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**Moving Image, Montage and Memory:** The development of a critical documentary practice, exploring Irish identity through an exploration into found film archives and the cinematic treatment of time and memory

Genevieve Mc Gill

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
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## **Abstract**

The main aim of this thesis is to provide a voice to a marginalised community on the island of Inishbofin off the North West coast of Co. Donegal in Ireland. The film's usefulness lies in its portrayal of a small, indigenous, fragile community that clings to existence and its strength lies in giving voice to this minority in an attempt to correct perceptions of Irishness.

This thesis seeks to enrich the discourse surrounding the way Irish identity is reconciled through the moving image. The theme is explored through an investigation of a previously unseen film archive—The Martin Archive—alongside my own documentary film practice. Time within the context of the archive, the nation, the temporality of film, memory and nostalgia is used to structure this thesis exploration.

Within my research, the recognition of time and memory and the role these play in the construction of national identity have come to the fore. My documentary film work will intervene within this larger discourse to contribute to another way of thinking about and looking at Irish identity.

The ambiguity of historical time and the myth of authenticity are considered through an exploration of how the archive is assembled. My approach correlates with that of certain post-colonial theories, developed through an analysis of the writings of Homi K. Bhabha and Benedict Anderson.

In my original approach to this subject I have created a hybrid of two time frames by utilising both The Martin Archive and my own film work, in an attempt to question established notions of Irish national identity.

The research is a consideration of the constructed nature of narrative, exploring how a disruption in linear narrative and historical time can provide a new space of performativity, in which the spectator can explore Irish identity anew. By illuminating the multiplicities within

the films, the multiple minor voices - that are concurrent in time - can be heard. This process enables the practice to disrupt the time of official history by showing the time of the other. My practice is a temporal bricolage that documents a vulnerable, indigenous, Gaelic speaking community in Co. Donegal. The film work is a poetics of time; memory and fragility, which explores the past, present and future of the community portrayed within the experimental film archive.

The structure of the practice as a temporal bricolage displays a fragmented, multiple, jumbled narrative, where chronology itself is disrupted. The fragmentary nature of the practice ensures that no complete meaning can be fixed. The interlocking of historical and personal time enables a plurality of voices to be heard, contesting any dominant historical linear narrative.

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A special thank you to Dr. Donald Martin, whose life long dedication to recording his community has resulted in a richly textured filmic love story that I have been so graciously allowed to explore in this thesis.

To the people of Inishbofin, thank you for opening your doors and allowing my camera inside and to my father, Lochlann McGill, for enabling those doors to be opened to me. And to my mother Carmel, for her love of literature which sparked my imagination.

A thanks to my sister Olivia who generously gave her time and expertise in copyediting many rough drafts and to Phil, my husband, thank you for being there for me throughout and for your unwavering support.

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of Anna, Margaret and Nancy, whose glimpsed faces illuminate the screen.

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‘We are constructed in memory; we are simultaneously childhood, adolescence, old age and maturity.’

Federico Fellini

‘Memory is not in us; it is we who move in Being-memory, a world memory.’

Gilles Deleuze

**1.Introduction:** An exploration into the provision of voice to a marginalised community and an enquiry into fluid forms of identity, as a mutable rather than a fixed state that permits a critical engagement with both the past and present and opens up new possibilities for the future. The primary aim of the practice is to highlight the need for a closer reading of the peripheral sections of society and to let their voice be heard anew.

‘A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognised, the boundary is that from which something begins its presencing’  
(Heidegger, 1971, p. 152).

This thesis seeks to explore notions of Irish national identity and how Irish visual culture is mediated, both from the rural, traditional landscape of its peripheries (marginalised communities on the border sections of society), to contemporary narratives, where my practice will intervene within the discourse of documentary. I have chosen to portray this through considering the fragile rural community on the island of Inishbofin in Co. Donegal, North West Ireland. My contemporary documentary footage will be juxtaposed with, previously unseen, archival home-movie footage from a Donegal man, Dr. Donald Martin. I will call these the *Martin Archive*. The result is a new documentary film entitled *Return to the Sea* (2012), which at its core highlights the theme of provision of ‘voice’ to a marginalised community.

## **1.1 Provenance of my research work: How the primary question of giving voice to a marginalised community emerged, a personal background.**

This section will explore the provenance of my research work, how the primary question of giving voice to a marginalised community emerged: a personal background to the origins of the work.

A number of years ago, prior to beginning my PhD research, my father Lochlann McGill, upon the death of his own father Patrick (Wee Paddy) McGill in 1982, discovered in the attic of his father's house a wealth of copybooks, each crammed full of transcriptions that my grandfather had dictated from the local oral tradition of storytelling and poetry recital. He had recorded in these copybooks the tradition of local people moving from house to house on different nights reciting stories and in the case of his own mountain community he recorded their love of composing poems about the everyday situations and objects that filled their lives.

Paddy McGill, N.T., F.R.S.A.I., of Ardara, was firstly a teacher, teaching in Gaelic in the local schools in the area of Aighe, a mountain area just outside the small village of Ardara, in South West Donegal. He began his teaching career at Meentinadea National School until 1928 when he moved to Brackey School until 1956 and then finishing his teaching career as principle of Ardara Town School until his death.

But primarily Patrick McGill was an historian who diligently recorded the history of the area where he was born and raised. He was one of the longest serving members of the Donegal Historical Society and had the distinction of being President of the Society in 1954.

When my own father unearthed this array of oral history bound in the handwritten copybooks of his father he immediately wanted to preserve the bound books but principally he wanted to let the voice of the people, whose oral traditions were preserved within the books, to be heard afresh.

My father approached a number of production companies at the time to discuss the idea of

presenting the found material in documentary form, tracing the life of Wee Paddy while also letting the words of the poetry be recited in the programme.

The response from the production companies and their intended treatment of the material was disappointing. Discussions arose about having the material recited by an older actor sitting in front of an open fire. Immediately the image felt stagnant and my father and I together decided to tackle the problem of how to portray the local people and their rich folklore without the use of such engrained clichéd images.

The voice of the local people must be heard anew and so we embarked on our first film project together. The documentary film *Fili na gCnoc* (The Mountain Poets) was screened by TG4 (the Gaelic speaking TV station) in 2004.

*Fili na gCnoc* is a joint artistic creation between myself as filmmaker and my father Lochlann as historian. In it we set out to trace and bring to life the preserved poems from the small mountainous Gaeltacht areas of ‘Aighe’ and ‘Glengesh’ in South Donegal. These old Gaelic poems on the verge of extinction were re-discovered and diligently recorded by my grandfather. My father Lochlann has always had a keen interest in the ‘local’ and the ‘parochial’. His strong sense of place, in particular the ways in which his home place has moulded him, and in turn me, his daughter, initiated the documentary project in which the topography and history of the landscape and the emotions of the people are reflected in their story, song and poetry.

What is intriguing about the findings within the documentary project is that it shows us a society that used poetry as a means of expression. These mountain people wrote poems of satire, anger, love and lament, in which they gave an account of the everyday in their lives. They wrote about their animals, about weaving, spinning, ‘carding’ (the technique of preparing wool for spinning) loneliness, love, anger and especially their locality. *Fili na gCnoc* gives a voice to their unique story. The film is simple, yet is infused with photographic stills, original animation, and a rich, poignant musical score. All of this enables us, the viewer, to steal a glimpse of the curious and mottled existence of an almost forgotten people.

Thus began my own journey into my PhD research, and the documentary film I made for my PhD entitled *Return to the Sea* (2012). The theme of giving voice to a fragile indigenous community is paramount to both the practical and written component of my PhD research. The plight of the community of Inishbofin Island off the North West coast of Donegal in Ireland (that sits precariously between a traditional past and the onslaught of modernisation) is the focus of the documentary film and giving a voice to this minority is it's primary aim. The contemporary footage of Inishbofin is juxtaposed in the documentary with an older archive of Super 8 films, *The Martin Archive*. Dr. Donald Martin shot this archive from the 1950s onwards in the rural fishing community of Killybegs in South West Donegal. Martin now in his eighties is a retired dentist and doctor in Killybegs and has scrupulously recorded his communities' religious festivals, weddings, christenings and treasured intimate family gatherings for many decades right up to the present day. Martin's richly textured filmic archive had had some previous local screenings but has not been seen outside of his local community. Martin's tireless recording of his community has resulted in a filmic archive unmatched by many in the field of amateur filmmaking and is a significant intervention in any discussion of the broader shape of Irish moving-image culture. The role it plays within the documentary *Return To The Sea* is vital and it is hoped that there can be a re-investment by me in the community by it's screening both locally and internationally. In the re-framing of Martin's filmic archive within my own documentary it aids in giving voice to another marginalised community and thus sits well within the context and aim of this thesis.

Irish visual and oral culture and Irish identity are intrinsically linked; therefore it is crucial for my own research that I fully understand the origins and overlap between the two. This thesis will consider the term the *minoritarian identity*, its construction and how it could relate to the construction of Irish identity. *Minoritarian identity* in this context entails a thinking of the social as what the post-colonial theorist Homi. K. Bhabha elsewhere describes as performative. He suggests:

'The creation of new minorities reveals a liminal, interstitial public sphere that emerges *in-between* the state and the non-state, *in-between* individual rights and group needs'  
(Bhabha, 2000, p. 4–5).

My work aims to highlight the need for the transformation of a culture from within a marginalised community and so for this thesis I have engaged critically with Ireland's own visual past. Luke Gibbons' book *Transformations in Irish Culture* (1996) has helped in the rejuvenation of a critical debate surrounding Irish identity in Ireland. It is because of Gibbons' unique contribution to this discourse that I spent time recording and interviewing him on the debate surrounding Irish visual culture for my PhD research. The transcript from this interview is included in the bound thesis. Within this thesis, I highlight the thematic parallels between Gibbons' research and my own practice. I will focus in this thesis on his discussion of Irish filmmaking, in which he suggests that 'media representations and cultural forces in general act as transformative forces in society, rather than as 'reflections' or mimetic forms at one remove from reality' (Gibbons, 1996, p.xii). The theme of transformation from within (a community or society) and giving voice to a marginalised community is paramount to this PhD research.

The theories of one of the most important figures in contemporary post-colonial studies, Homi K. Bhabha, have been instrumental in the structure of this thesis. Bhabha posits the term 'right to narrate', essentially a right of intervention in the telling of histories. My own practice seeks to highlight the necessity of the minor voice in society to be heard in the historicity of Irish identity.

The 'right to narrate' for Bhabha encapsulates

'all those forms of creative behaviour that allow us to represent the lives we lead, question the conventions and customs that we inherit...and dare to entertain the most audacious hopes and fears for the future. The right to narrate might inhabit a hesitant brush stroke, be glimpsed in a gesture that fixes a dance movement or become visible in a camera angle that stops your heart. Suddenly in painting, dance, or cinema you rediscover your senses, and in that *process* you understand something profound about yourself, your historical moment, and what gives value to a life lived in a particular town, at a particular time, in particular social and political conditions' (Bhabha, 2003, p. 180).

Bhabha's concept of the 'right to narrate' identifies the necessity of reinserting antagonistic and disjunctively temporal elements into the discourse of national identity.

My documentary practice becomes a site of analysis where these disjunctively temporal elements are reinserted, where an explicit focus on how Irish identity is perceived and its post-coloniality and the notion of nation, is explored. The strength of the research is in giving voice to an indigenous rural people (allowing a community to narrate) from the periphery of society and an attempt is made to correct perceptions of Irishness.

Through a discussion of Gibbons' and other noted film theorists' work, this thesis seeks to enrich the field of film and documentary discourses surrounding *Irish identity*, *landscape* and *nostalgia*. The research will intervene within the larger discourse of *post-coloniality* and notions of *nation* by reference to the theorist Homi K. Bhabha, among others, alongside an exploration of the rural community and the provision of voice within my own practice. The contemporary documentary footage of Inishbofin, juxtaposed with the *Martin Archive*, and the articulation of the cultural differences of the people portrayed within, becomes an innovative site for an analysis of Irish identity and how it can be read anew.

Ideas surrounding *disjunctive temporalities* and *time* will be identified in the following chapters, through the work of Gilles Deleuze and Mary Ann Doane, and explored through film experiments that disrupt a fixed linear narrative within my own practice. Finally, I will identify continuities between my filmic working methods and the work of other filmmakers, most notably Harun Farocki and Hollis Frampton.



## 1.2 Methodology

This section elaborates on the term *distantiation*, a methodological strategy used to emancipate the spectator to reach his or her own conclusions in the reading of my practice and on the term *in-betweenness*, denoted as the space in my practice where past and present overlap and merge in the form of the double narrative of the archives.

Terms such as ‘*practice-based*’ and ‘*practice-led*’ have been reviewed and redefined constantly within the field of research in recent years. I subscribe to the definition proposed by Professor Martin Woolley (2000). He differentiated between, practice-based research—in which the conventional methods of art and design practice in the studio or workshop are used to explore research questions—and practice-led research—in which questions or problems of significance to art and/or design practice are addressed using methods from other disciplines, so that the research outcomes will enhance practice (Woolley, 2000). I place my own research work within the *practice-based* framework. This section sets out the methods I have utilised to identify significant research outcomes. It shows what has been learnt through the development of the practice, with an emphasis on what can be communicated to others, so that they can build upon it. I situate my own documentary practice within the field of Irish moving-image culture. My work will mark a point of intervention within this field; post the moving-image revivalists of the 1990s, as I will mention in my practice review. The aim of my practice is to engage in deepening the discourse, and enriching the contemplation and conversations of Irish moving-image culture, to question the clichéd images of the popularised notion of Ireland and Irishness, and to negotiate a re-visioning of Irish identity by giving a voice to the marginalised community within my documentary *Return to the Sea*.

There are deficiencies in documentary filmmaking at the level of identity outside of the mainstream; the primary question within my film practice became how to give a voice to this marginalised community and to let it be heard anew? A significant element in how to let the voice be heard anew came in the form of avant-garde techniques of experimentation, which were employed within the film practice itself. Within my film practice I experimented with what is termed *Distantiation* (connected with the *alienation effect* practiced and theorised by the playwright Bertolt Brecht), as a methodological

strategy in order to emancipate the spectator, to allow the spectator to do the work, to reach his or her own conclusions. The concept coined by Brecht is that 'which prevents the audience from losing itself passively and completely in the character created by the actor, and which consequently leads the audience to be a consciously critical observer'. (Willett, 1964, p.91). I employed the effect of distantiation within my film practice in order to explore the possibilities *and* limitations of using my film to challenge the mainstream ideological and institutional structures.

A gap or a space of '*in-betweenness*', a term I will elaborate on further in this thesis was used as a way to structure the film, the gap between the images in the film (between the archival Super 8 footage and contemporarily shot Super 8 footage used), meant that the audience had to decipher what time frame they were watching unfold on screen.

I have within this thesis given an in-depth analysis of the work of filmmakers like Harun Farocki, Hollis Frampton and Peter Forgac as paradigmatic of my own working methods. I will also explore the working methods of Avant-garde filmmakers like Chris Marker and Alain Renais amongst others, their tracing of multiple narratives, the use of discontinuities within their narratives and the potential for falsification of certain narrative threads is analysed, as surely these are the ancestors to my working methods.

A pertinent question within film theory concerning distantiation asks whether a film can achieve its intended political effect simply by being formally alienating without being directly political, particularly in today's post-modernist cinema, where the shock factor has become part of the standard working methods used by Hollywood.

Within my own film practice I have utilised contemporary Super 8 footage that I have shot and juxtaposed with older archival footage, *The Martin Archive*. I used this working method not to emulate the older archival footage but with the intention of tricking the spectator into questioning the actual time frame they are watching unfold on screen. Jumbled time frames and images are utilised to create non-linear chronology and to afford alternative endings to the film's viewer. The artifice is clearly revealed in the process, it is part of the experimentation, and to some degree this experimentation raises questions in relation to authenticity and ethics perhaps at the cost of the original Super 8 footage. I am

conscious of the dangers involved in using a montage of old and new footage in this way but for me it is an important experiment in fully interrogating the images both old and new. I will now elaborate on these methodologies.

When I started out documenting this rural community on Inishbofin in Donegal, I had my own preconceptions to overcome. This was a remote island community that had lost a great number of its inhabitants to emigration and over the years had fallen silent (during the winter months at least), due to bad transport links and a lack of government interest in its plight. My intention for the practice sprang from a desire to preserve a disappearing way of life in the vicinity of the community where I grew up.

The working methods I employed was to set about gathering a crew for the shoot on Inishbofin that would include my father Dr. Lochlann McGill, the local GP for the island community. His presence and the trust the island people put in him enabled access to the homes of the islanders that would have otherwise have been impossible.

The interview method I employed was simple, the same question was put to each interviewee: *What is it like living on the island?* The interviews took place in informal settings where I knew the interviewee would feel comfortable, mostly in their homes or as they worked on their boats. What followed I captured on camera, allowing the conversation to develop naturally with no further set questions. I felt that this less structured approach allowed the person being interviewed much more flexibility in their response. Sometimes a probe was used; a device to get the interviewees to expand on a response when I felt they had more to give. Sometimes this took the form of an object, in the case of the corn Fáinne (ring) used in the Michael McFadden interview, or the figurine of the cat used in the interview with Margaret, the retired teacher. Or I merely asked about an object in the room, this method helped produce unexpected or unanticipated answers. I also employed periods of silence after the interviewee had finished answering before I turned off the camera as often when the camera is thought to be off, a glimpse of the true personality is revealed.

Apart from the semi-structured interviews I employed a method of *vérité* as a research methodology. As the actions and behaviour of people are central aspects in any enquiry, a

natural and obvious technique is to watch and listen to what they do, to record this in some way. I did this by staying on the island for a number of weeks and taking part in whatever local happenings I could, the renewal of a marriage in the local church and by attending a local céile (dance). I have been asked to not include the footage of the céile by the islanders. The vérité footage I shot acts as supportive material that puts in perspective the information garnered by the interviews.

After the shoot wrapped I thought what I had captured was the notion of enforced isolation that the islanders felt as a result of often having to leave the island because of a lack of employment, or because the local school had been shut down. But when I began to review this work with a lengthy revision of the rushes from my shoot, a different picture was revealed.

There was humour, the delivery of their memories of Island life were not bitter because of enforced emigration from the island, but were jovial. The presence of the Catholic Church on the island, and my recorded visit of the local priest coming onto the island from the mainland to hold Mass on the island, is not an image of the militant Catholic Church, but instead shows another thread that seems to re-enforce their sense of community. What struck me most on reviewing this footage, almost a year after I shot it, was the abundance of children, from newborns to toddlers, to young teenagers.

I felt then that this footage could not merely be viewed from my initial point of view-capturing a community on the verge of extinction-but showed, instead, a community that in its own way was still thriving, where a sense of community was not merely a redundant cliché from Robert Flaherty's film *Man of Aran* (1934). Nor was it a desolate depressive environment, ravaged almost to extinction by unemployment as portrayed in the modern revivalist films, but rather it was a community that was content in itself and was getting on with it.

While reviewing my rushes, I still had the niggling problem that these images of lone fishermen rowing along in their small wooden boats, or shots of the ruined school house, surrounded by the beauty of the wild Atlantic ocean, could be read by spectators of the work as a cliché of the wild and beautiful West of Ireland that they encapsulated.

The methodology I employ in my own practice must challenge these clichéd notions inscribed within the images I shot, and must subvert them in some way. In my *re-assembly* of the older archival footage, *The Martin Archive*, that I juxtaposed with my own contemporary archive of Inishbofin, I created a new montage of images. I picked them apart, slowed them down, and repeated them, to create something new with the dismantling of the image.

### 1.3 Juxtaposition and Montage

My working methods are explored in this section including the juxtaposing of two filmic archives, in a hope to extract any hidden memories, histories or identities within them by letting the archives be seen in a new context.

Thomas Elsaesser in his book *Harun Farocki: Working on the Sight-Lines* (2004), references the Brechtian influence in Farocki's work when he writes (in relation to Farocki's working methods) 'the cinema has many histories, only some of which belong to the movies. It takes an artist-archaeologist, rather than a mere historian, to detect, document and reconstruct them...' 'Detect, document, reconstruct': the terms are deliberately ambiguous. They highlight... a particular challenge of agency when talking about an artist who also considers himself an activist. If the word had not paled into a cliché, 'intervene' might be the (Brechtian) term that applies to Farocki's early work and to its radical ambitions when he began making films in the 1960s.' (Elsaesser, 2004, p.12).

Within my own working methods, in juxtaposing two filmic archives, I hope to extract any hidden memories, histories or identities by letting these archives be seen in a new context. Much like an archaeologist who digs in the earth for clues to the past I am chipping away at the older *Martin Archive*, for I must look to the past to grasp the present.

As is true of any archive it can hide the sometimes-false construction or laws in place when an archive was created. My working methods of employing elements of distantiation by interjecting constructed Super 8 footage to appear as older archival footage aims to stress the anonymity of found footage in order to provoke a critical reflection on the construction of history and public memory. This is done in an attempt to give a voice to a marginalised community and to correct perceptions of Irishness. The discordance of temporality within the practice is highlighted, the time of inscription of the filmic archive and the time of contemplation are played with. This method is employed in an attempt to remind the spectator of the alternative histories that found footage offers to any official version of history.

Farocki uses a working method of reframing images, he creates a web of reflections, where new meanings appear in the interstice between sequences, plucked out of context and reframed. By manipulating and reframing archival footage, which decontextualises them, a new meaning can be revealed. As with my own film *Return to the Sea*, the gap between the two archives seen on screen allows, by their juxtaposition, other voices to be heard. My own employment of Super 8 footage that I have shot interjected between the older archival footage and my own contemporary DV footage in done in order to stress the space and time between when the images were recorded and when they are reframed and viewed. The structural method of placing images side-by-side, used by Farocki and emulated within my own practice has the purpose of illuminating that which exists between the images, to yield another image and make it visible or in the case of my film to let another voice be heard.

I employed montage as a working method within my practice; I had dual reasons for using montage within the work. It was used to reflect, to some degree, on the fragmentation that is part of Ireland's make-up but can also be read as a cinematic attribute connected with James Joyce's style of writing, I will elaborate on this connection further in this thesis. The archival and contemporary footage criss-cross to portray a montage of the different strands that make-up Irish identity. The juxtaposition of images creates a feeling of disintegration and fragmentation, when the images collide and recede in different temporal sections, it enables the work to produce an emotional 'shock' that Sergei Eisenstein advocated.

Esther Shub utilises what Sergei Eisenstein called 'intellectual montage' when manipulating newsreels and home movie footage in her work. Intellectual montage is the idea of creating meaning out of the 'collision' of film shots: 'two film pieces of any kind, placed together, inevitably combine into a new concept, a new quality, arising out of that juxtaposition' (Eisenstein in Jay Leyda (ed.), 1986, p.14)

Shub's compilation films [most notably *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* (1927)] use the concept of montage as the systematic use of conflict with, and between, cinematic images,

*the montage of attraction*. My own filmic practice employs the use of montage in a similar vein. The film *Return to the Sea* re-negotiates the past (images of the past) to understand the present. Historical images and the historical event do not only reside in the past but are inevitably connected to the present.

Shub's working methods like Dziga Vertov's can be read within the aesthetic of distantiation. Vertov interrogates the image in his film *Man With a Movie Camera* (1929), an avant-garde, documentary meta-narrative, which analyses Soviet workers and filmmaking to portray a typical day in Moscow. But Vertov doesn't just record reality; he attempts to transform it through the power of what he termed the camera's "kino-glaz" (cine- eye). Vertov's rich imagery manages to transcend our way of seeing what is shown on screen.

By utilizing the editing technique of montage, Vertov strung different images together without considering continuity, in order to stimulate the viewer, much as I have attempted to do within my own film practice. The dis-continuity editing I employ as a working method has the effect of stimulating thought in the spectator – *what time frame am I watching unfold on screen?* Montage has shaped the work of many filmmakers whose work I will analyse closely within this thesis most especially the Avant-garde filmmakers who used Soviet montage theory and practice to develop their method of cinéma vérité. My own working methods most definitely have their roots within the canon of cinéma vérité and the avant-garde.



## 1.4 Performative Documentary

This section is an examination of the use of performance by filmmakers to accentuate the means of producing the work, to accentuate an awareness of the falsification and subjectification that any representation of reality entails.

The role of performance within my working methods is explored in relation to the primary aim within this thesis of giving a voice to a marginalised community. The concept of national in performative (filmic) works creates a space for ‘writing the nation’ (Bhabha, 1990) anew. Performative documentaries are an articulation by filmmakers designed to accentuate the means of producing the work, an awareness of the falsification and subjectification any representation of reality entails. Within my own film *Return to the Sea* I play with these ideas by falsifying newly shot Super 8 footage and inserting in within the older archival footage. The construction and methods employed in structuring the documentary are exposed so that the viewer begins to ask questions as to the veracity of the time-frame of the footage on screen. Stella Bruzzi explores the idea of performative documentary in her book *New Documentary* (2000), her main rationale being the importance of performativity in relation to documentary. Performance documentary is understood as a mode, which emphasises and indeed constructs a film around, the often hidden aspects of performance. Documentaries are a negotiation between the filmmaker and reality, at heart, a performance. Within my own film practice I employ the notion of performance by disrupting the linear narrative of the images by inserting the constructed Super 8 footage. This disruption in linear narrative and historical time can provide a new space of performativity, in which the spectator can explore Irish identity afresh.

A reference for me while exploring my own working methods came in the form of Michael Renov’s book *The Subject of Documentary* (2004), which explores documentary filmmaking as an important means for both examining and constructing selfhood. Renov analyses films in which subjectivity and nontraditional modes of autobiographical practice are key, thus redefining definitions of documentary, most especially in relation to film and subjectivity.

Bruzzi discusses the notion of performativity when she writes ‘that a documentary’s meaning, its identity, is not fixed but fluid and stems from a productive, dialectical relationship between the text, the reality it represents and the spectator... filmmakers and spectators alike comprehend the inherent difficulties with representation in the non-fiction film but that this understanding does not invalidate either the documentary film or the documentary purist; that a documentary itself is the crucial point at which the factual event, the difficulties of representation and the act of watching a documentary are confronted – if not resolved’ (Bruzzi, 2000, p.7)

Rather than the received understanding of the performative documentary discussed by Bill Nichols in his book *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture* (1994) I find Stella Bruzzi’s understanding of authenticity speaks to the underlying issues in these films.

In the same way that fact and fiction became blurred in Shub’s use of dramatized footage of the storming of the Winter Palace from Eisenstein's *October* (1928), in her film *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* (1927) so too can Robert Flaherty’s working methods be seen as performative. His relaxed use of dramatisation in his films *Man of Aran* (1934) or *Nanook of the North* (1922) amongst others are discussed by Professor Brian Winston in his book *Claiming the Real II: Documentary: Grierson and Beyond* (2008). This point is elaborated upon in section 6.9 Images of Ireland: The right to narrate from the periphery.

‘What has emerged in recent documentary practice is a new definition of authenticity, one that eschews the traditional adherence to observation...(or to the) notion of the transparency of film and replaces this with a multi-layered, performative exchange between subjects, film-makers/apparatus and spectators’  
(Bruzzi, 2000, p.10).

And it is within this new definition of performance documentary that I place my own practice and working methods.

### **1.5 A clarification of the issues of authenticity and ethics:** A look at the production of the documentary *Return To The Sea*.

When making any documentary, shooting real people in everyday situations, questions of morality, assertions of the authenticity of the image and a supposed claim to truth will arise. I have discussed previously within the written component of this thesis that I see my film practice having its roots within the canon of the Avant-garde and experimentalism. I make no such claim to truth but instead regard the documentary *Return To The Sea* as a filmic experiment. I will throughout this thesis refer to the practice of other filmmakers whose work I admire, most especially those who experiment with non-linear chronology and narratives within their work such as Chris Marker, Hollis Frampton and Harun Farocki. And it is within this working method of playing with the films structure, chronology, narrative and time that my practice is situated.

Within my documentary *Return To The Sea* I cut (in the editing room) both my own 'live' documentary footage with the recycled shots of the archival (*Martin*) films and present day Super 8 footage, which I have shot myself, to create a new assemblage of two time frames. I used this process of re-assemblage and appropriation, to create and de-create, to re-tell the story of these people. The continuities across the two 'archives' is simply a wish on the side of the filmmakers, myself and Martin, to preserve a moment in time of a community local to us that we have a personal connection to individually. That they have been shot sixty years and sixty miles apart is irrelevant, what is of importance is the ambition of the filmmaker to capture the ordinary, to mark it as extraordinary by preserving it. And in doing so enabling the voice of this indigenous community to be heard anew.

The documentary *Return To The Sea* hinges on four critical concepts:

#### **1) To disrupt any linear and continuous reading of history:**

This is attempted by utilising multiple temporalities within the construct of the film. My own contemporary DV footage is juxtaposed with archival Super 8 footage, *The Martin Archive*, alongside present-day Super 8 footage, which I have shot myself. There is a

deliberate intention to trick the viewer by utilising a mixture of archival and contemporary Super 8 footage. This 'trick' is merely a tool which is intended to jolt the viewer out of any complacent reading of the footage, they begin then to question what they are seeing unfold on screen, the time of the footage is questioned. By utilising this structure within the film production, I formally invoke the multiplicities in the local community in a literal way - where past and present become indistinguishable. Film and video have a creative and transformative ability to play with time and space.

## **2) Narration and re-narration**

By utilising archival Super 8 footage alongside the contemporary footage multiple histories are seen on screen. A plurality of voices can be heard and a process of narration, and re-narration is present when the re-emergent histories (with the use of the archival Super 8 footage) of a peripheral community create a plurality of voices and disrupt the pedagogic view of national identity. Instead, plural histories inflected by gender and class creates plural temporalities, exploding a dominant, colonial reading of history.

## **3) The Practice – a space of the *In-between***

A gap exists between the older archival footage and the contemporary footage, between the different voices in time, my own voice and the voice of Dr. Martin, who both express ourselves through film. Within the film production, in the space of the *in-between*, a gap exists where an alternative can be read. In the editing of the practice, in the gaps and through the layering of times, a site is created where writing the nation anew becomes possible.

#### 4) Bring forth the marginalised voice.

The aim of my practice is to bring forth the marginalised voice from the periphery of society and allow it a more prominent status in any reading of Irish identity. In the practice, the nuanced testimonies are crucial in any disruption of a perceived true, dominant reading of history and are productive in destabilising the false colonial foundation upon which they have been built.

Questions of authenticity and ethics arise when taking footage out of sequence by manipulating its chronology and misleading the audience as I have done by inserting contemporary Super 8 footage alongside the archival Super 8 footage.

Much in the same way that claims of truthfulness, authenticity and veracity by the prominent filmmakers of Direct Cinema have come to be challenged because of their refusal to acknowledge the role their own intrusion, and the role performance, played in their films, so too in my production the aura of truth is exploded. The incorporation of performance in documentaries can be traced back even earlier than Direct Cinema, to the father of dramatic manipulation and distortion, Robert Flaherty. [I explore Flaherty's *Man of Aran* (1934) and his distortion of reality within his working methods in detail in the subsection: 6.9 Images of Ireland: the right to narrate from the periphery (p.128)].

To help counter the ethical problems involved in the filmmaker/subject/viewer relationship within my production there are numerous references to me (as filmmaker) within the documentary by the interviewees:

*'I wonder what that woman is doing anyway?'* asks the older interviewee James Ferry to a young boy, while looking at me standing off camera.

The boy: *'What woman?'* says the boy.

James: *'That woman standing there!'* they both laugh.

In another instance the interviewer Pól Penrose is asked by the interviewee Margaret McFadden *'Is she doing a short programme?'*

Pól replies: '*Genevieve is making a short film*'.

Again when the interviewee John O'Brien quips that '*You're going to bring the whole island to a standstill to get this big film made!*' the presence of the cameras and the *making* of a film are referenced. In this way my presence on the island and my relationship to the subjects as filmmaker is acknowledged within the production of the documentary. As a documentarist it is my responsibility to deal sensitively with the ethical issues that arise within the production of the documentary. It therefore must acknowledge the mark I have left on this place while filming. This acknowledgement of my presence serves to remind the viewer that ultimately what they are watching unfold on screen is a construction. The technique of not hiding the working mechanisms of documentary, where the camera or sound boom is often glimpsed in shot is a working method I employ to this end.

I want to refer to an essay written by Professor Brian Winston entitled: *Documentary: How The Myth Was Reconstructed*. The essay discusses the documentary *How The Myth Was Made* (1979) by George Stoney, which is a study of Robert Flaherty's documentary *Man of Aran* (1934). *How The Myth Was Made* discusses authenticity and the ethical problems during the production of *Man of Aran* and its social function thereafter. It is today fully acknowledged that Flaherty's working methods involved the manipulation of everyday footage shot using real people for his own gains, to create an entertaining but highly constructed narrative with a disregard for the authenticity of the image or ethical issues. Flaherty often jeopardising the safety of the people he used in his productions. But Stoney to some degree justifies Flaherty's techniques and acknowledges the films 'documentary value' despite his manipulations of place and people. Winston in his essay discusses the rows over the authenticity of the image in relation to the audience and 'the perceived need to ensure that what is shown on the documentary screen is a representation of some pre-existing reality -- a species of "contract with the viewer"'. (Winston) This limited view of a promised veracity being precisely what direct cinema demands. Winston elaborates that, 'by insisting on the unbiased evidential nature of its techniques and by stressing the freedom this supposedly gives an audience to make up its own mind, direct cinema thereby downplays the limitations of its observational techniques and its moral deficiencies as regards the subject, two of the issues central to *How The Myth Was Made* and Stoney's

overall position'. (Winston).

Alongside Stoney's rejection of direct cinema's view of un-manipulated truth Winston notes that so too Stoney:

'queried the assertion that the new style automatically transformed the audience into jurors able to determine what had transpired in reality from the evidence presented to them on the screen. Stoney's point of view on the documentarist's relationship with an audience seems to be that if mediation truthfully illuminates the issue at hand, then the interventions necessary to get the image are justified by this enlightenment. The "contract with the viewer" is to provide understanding not to promise to avoid manipulation'. (Winston).

There is a level of manipulation of both the film stock and in turn the viewers of my own production but the mediation and techniques used have the purpose of unsettling the viewer, to jolt them out of any complacent viewing of the images to enable them to question and reflect upon the time-frame and chronology seen on screen. Thus questioning the supposed authenticity of any documentary image seen on any screen. The Super 8 images are real and not real, challenging the viewer to make sense of the experience. I see the release of my documentary *Return to The Sea*, by bringing people together to see it, as only the beginning of my research. The documentary will act as a vehicle for social change. Both to give voice to this marginalised fragile community in North West Donegal but also hopefully in correcting perceptions of Irishness within a public arena.

In the interview I conducted with the theorist Luke Gibbons, which is included in the bound thesis, Gibbons discusses the use of the frame within a frame. In the production of *Return To The Sea* there is a constant framing and re-framing of the screen. Often an images frame decreases in size and becomes a smaller frame within the larger framing of the screen. Gibbons discusses how the viewer gets lost in the frame or connects images that weren't necessarily meant to be connected. As if the viewer changes the whole meaning of the images. I will add here an excerpt from the conclusion to my interview with Gibbons in which he describes the work of Irish artists, Irish painters in particular. Gibbons notes that:

‘all that is needed to connect paintings in a room is for a person to walk into the room and to begin to take on meaning even where none was intended and the glances from one painting to another set up almost accidental meanings that have no connection to the meanings of the painting themselves. In that sense I think that the kind of reflexivity of Irish art and it’s self consciousness and the fact that Irish artists were bringing almost this extra layer of critical engagement perhaps meant that naturalism and realism, the kinds of things that the image was most valued for, that they were really the casualties of this kind of reflexivity. Almost as if there was more to vision than meets the eye and that Irish painters are trying to see what exactly is that more to vision, beyond the opticality of the image- all the other hidden histories of the image- and are trying to bring them out into the open’.

(Gibbons interview 2006-see appendix of this thesis)

Within my own production there is an attempt made to solicit the viewer’s sense of discovery, which may grow with means other than plot, story or message, means unique to cinema.

Employing re-assemblage and re-appropriation techniques when working with *The Martin Archive*, as I do in *Return To The Sea*, to re-tell the story of these people, I have had to tread on a very thin ethical line. With the use of film montage, where archival Super 8 footage is juxtaposed with contemporarily shot Super 8 footage I have dislodged the archive documents from a fixed reading, from a fixed point in time, because of the way the time frames criss-cross unendingly. This manipulation is intended to make it impossible for the viewer to attribute a fixed identity onto the characters seen on screen, rendering the identity of the people in the film as fluid. A working method of interlocking historical and personal time enables a plurality of voices to be heard, helping to disrupt any dominant historical linear reading of these people. But an ethical question arose in my use of archival Super 8 footage where a number of the people seen on screen are now sadly deceased. These images must be handled sensitively and with dignity for the people portrayed in them.

I worked closely with Dr. Donald Martin (of *The Martin Archive*) during the production of *Return to The Sea*. A number of sessions were spent both watching Martin’s archival Super 8 footage and discussing the individuals it portrayed. When I first discussed the project



with Martin he had just lost his wife Anna. This was an incredibly difficult time for Martin and at this stage he did not want to either view or have the films screened. The loss of Anna brought the question of the ethical use of archival film footage to the fore of my research. But after an intense period of mourning had elapsed for Martin he wanted the films to be seen anew. In fact this thesis is dedicated to the memory of Anna. Martin has been a chronicler of his local community of Killybegs in South West Donegal for his entire life; he is now in his eighties. He has published two books during his lifetime comprising of photographs of his community from the past, which he then compares with photographs taken at the same locations that he has shot in the present day. The books *Killybegs: Then and Now* (1999) and *Down Memory Lane* (2012), published after the death of his beloved wife Anna, comprise of a stunning collection of character portraits and local events as well as recording the march of time in this small community. The books and the original photographs, which date back to the 1950s, have become a rich archive for the local community. When the books were published Martin was inundated with requests from local people in the community for copies of the photographs of deceased family members that appeared in Martin's books. Martin in giving me his permission to publish his archival Super 8 footage has let me bind these images anew. The documentary *Return To The Sea* in turn I hope will act as a rich archival source for future generations. The archive films of Dr. Martin can be seen as his personal inscription. He did not record memories; he recorded his present. These Donegal archives have been given to me, to re-bind (in my editing). They contain within them, the personal inscription of both Martin's hand, and mine by what I have chosen to keep, and he has chosen to shoot. Even with the manipulation of the images (in *Return To The Sea*) the documentary can still stand alone as a filmic archive. For me, as the present guardian of this archive, there can be no present without memory. Therefore, to understand a broader sense of contemporary Irish identity, we must look to the past to grasp the present.

The research outcome is a practice which I hope will communicate to others a new understanding, of the subtleties, nuances and fragilities of a marginalised society, be it an Irish society or otherwise. And I would anticipate that this archive could be built upon by future filmmakers, whereby new communications can be created in our understanding of the Irish image on screen. I intend for my documentary practice to be a portrayal of a society in motion, by giving a voice to this community I hope that my work may continue

to reflect upon and contribute to the evolution of Irish society as a questioning and discursive voice. Every recorded image has a role to play and, in some instances, can reflect on how a whole nation can be read. Every image is, as Agamben paraphrases Walter Benjamin in his *Difference and Repetition*, 'charged with history because it is the door through which the Messiah enters' (Agamben, 2002, p. 315).

## 2. The mnemonic archive: time, nostalgia, memory and their filmic presence

‘Though much is taken, much abides’

Alfred Lord Tennyson from the poem *Ulysses*.

This is a line of poetry that my mother keeps on the kitchen fridge in my family home in Donegal, alongside other quotes that she finds in newspaper articles or books she is reading. She hand-writes these on pieces of paper and sticks them on the door of the fridge. The quote came to mind when I began the process of thinking about the notion of nation and home, and the role memory plays in this process.

Nostalgia is not always an evocation of a utopian past, but a very unique form of longing. The Greek derivation is ‘nostos’: to return home, and ‘algos’: a painful condition, in essence *the wounds of returning*. My film practice touches on the theme of nostalgia, the sense of place, and of home, where historical and personal times interlock within the film work. The people of Inishbofin, where the documentary films are shot, are in a tenuous position. They sit at the intersection between a traditional, religious past, and an uncertain future bringing with it the encroachment of modernity.

The island people’s everyday livelihood of fishing, their Irish language and the sustainability and future of their homes is at risk. In my contemporary documentary sequence, the nature of one of the introductory shots, that of the dilapidated schoolroom contextualises the issues of fragility, and illuminates the delicate balance between the island’s past and its uncertain future. It could be seen as a sequence of reminiscences of a lost past, but it also portrays a stark moment in the present that encapsulates a gloomy foreboding. As the indigenous filmmaker who is placed in the position of insider/outsider, I am ultimately recording my own sense of detachment from a place.

The *wounds of returning* is a mixture of the desire to restore the sense of belonging that is associated with childhood and the emotional resonance that goes with it. You can never really return home. There is an uneasy feeling that what I am capturing in the documentary films is a world that is already lost.

In this chapter, 'The mnemonic Archive', I explore temporality, the role of memory and nostalgia, both in my own practice - where I utilise reassembled film archives - and in the film work of other artists and documentary filmmakers. The selected artists' films discussed in this section are used as examples of different ways in which to represent time and especially the past on screen. The trace of the image, and the image's past life, becomes a method of connecting the past with the present for the filmmaker. Both my practice, and the other filmmakers' work, is a critical reflection on the production of memory in the moving image.

## 2.1 The minor voice

This section will explore how archival images are used to comment on other images, for example, when images are juxtaposed or replayed and manipulated so that something (else) may become visible in the gaps. The ‘gap’ created becomes a space in which the marginalised voice can be heard.

As I have already indicated, a major element of my practice comes in the form of a previously unseen film archive, which I have called *The Martin Archive*. This filmic archive was shot by an amateur film enthusiast called Dr. Donald Martin, a native of Donegal who began his filmic exploration of his community in Killybegs, in South West Donegal in the 1950s.

As I have already described, my practice displays discontinuous, jumbled, multiplied, reversed and repeated images and time-lines derived from Martin’s archive (shot between the 1950s to the present day) and my own footage shot in Donegal (between 2006 to the present day). These jumbled archives force the spectator to pay close attention if they are to decipher which time they are seeing unfold on screen. The meaning-making becomes unstable, and its fragmentary nature means a complete meaning cannot be affixed. Here the meaning-making gesture is one of *disruption*.

For my work, and for the filmmakers whose work I discuss here (Hollis Frampton and Harun Farocki, among others), archival images are used to comment on other images. Images are juxtaposed or replayed and manipulated so that something (else) may become visible in the gaps. I have termed this ‘gap’, which creates a space for an alternate reading of history throughout the thesis, as the *minor voice*.

What is seen in my practice is a distortion of time, jumbled pasts that clash in the form of the *Martin Archive*, juxtaposed with my own Super 8 footage, which acts as mnemonic tool, a vehicle in which memories and vestiges of the past are called forth and illuminated before the viewer. In the presentation of my practice the viewer sees the many rituals Martin has recorded over his filming life. Many of the events are intertwined with religious rituals, a wedding or the blessing of the boats (where a priest boards a local fishing boat to

bless the boats of the small fishing village of Killybegs, where Dr. Martin lived and worked).

The lost time that is inherent in the archive footage and the inexorable march of time (implied in the shot of the dilapidated schoolroom in my own contemporary documentary footage) unfolds before the viewer. The practice displays non-linear times by showing multiple pasts, alongside glimpses of instances in the present.

It is intended, that the viewer *experiences* the passing of time on screen, rather than merely watching it, that they are aware of time unfolding in front of them. Deleuze describes this method of making the viewer experience time as ‘a cinema of the seer and no longer of the agent’ (Deleuze, 2005, p. 2).

Deleuze, in *Cinema 2* (2005), posits a labyrinthine model of time, which allows for all pasts, presents and futures to coexist simultaneously as an expanding whole. Time in this model is multi-layered and non-hierarchical; time reaches out in all directions, criss-crossing in all manner of ways. The labyrinthine model of time enables there to be, within my practice, multiple narratives (and voices) and not simply one *true*, dominant voice. With this model, any acceptance of the stability of truth, or a linear reading of history, is interrupted.

Within my practice, Deleuze’s model allows for the minor voices in history to be heard, where multiple readings of the past are available to us through the voices of the local community in Donegal. Unfolding before us are minor pasts, given the space to be made actual in the practice. These *Other* pasts, read as those of the minority, are sometimes relegated to the borders of an historical reading of a nation’s identity. This limiting version of the past can be used by dominant political authorities to inform our reading of the present. However this interruption by the minor voice intercepts the movement of time along this linear path and, instead, can enrich the reading of history by opening up new possibilities for an undetermined present.

What follows from Deleuze’s model is that the accepted *true* reading of history, of the dominant authority, is exposed as only one of the possible manifestations of time and its

historical reading. The minor voice has the power to *falsify* this *true* singular reading.

The hybrid temporal bricolage of the *Martin Archive* and my Super 8 footage can be seen to afford alternative interpretations. The images in the practice, displayed as they are in non-chronological order, enable this disrupted time frame to question the presumed accuracy of the past. This can allow an alternative reading of the present (and a contingent future), to become visible in the reading of Irish identity. Elizabeth Grosz touches on this when she writes:

‘This is not the abolition of history or a refusal to recognise the past and the historical debt the present owes to it, but simply to refuse to grant even the past the status of fixity and givenness. The past is always contingent on what the future makes of it’  
(Grosz, 2001, p. 104).

The practice can be seen to interrupt the time of official history by showing the time of the *other*, by disrupting, even one, linear stereotypical reading of Ireland’s past and its national identity. Instead an alternate temporality, and an alternate truth is proposed.

As I mentioned I have utilized the work of the filmmaker Dr. Donald Martin, whose archive spans over sixty years, from 1950s Ireland, to the present day. A public audience has never previously seen the archive, other than perhaps at intimate family gatherings where it would have been shown soon after the event recorded had taken place. The entire archive has now been cleaned and telecined, which has resulted in many hours of footage archived onto twelve DVDs. When this process was complete I sat with Dr. Martin and watched each DVD with him while he described each shot - where it was shot, who was in the shot and how he shot it. These sessions took place over a number of weeks in Donegal. Initially, Dr. Martin was reluctant to watch the footage with me. The reason for this was that he had just lost his wife, Anna. Dr. Martin had been an avid amateur filmmaker throughout his life and he had been the chronicler of his own life, the lives of the people he loved, and of the larger community that surrounded him. When Anna died he no longer wanted to shoot anything and felt it was too hard to watch what was a record of their life together.

What did unfold in his descriptions of the events was their love story. The films become imbued with his personal story; and history and memory become inescapably intertwined. Mikhail Bakhtin refers to the ever-present role memory plays in any discussion of the historical past when he writes:

‘It is impossible to change the factual, thing-like side of the past, but the meaningful, expressive, speaking side can be changed, for it is unfinalised and does not coincide with itself (it is free). The role of memory in this eternal transformation of the past...’ (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 230).

At the site of the practice, multiple time frames are in play and therefore a chronological linear reading of history is made impossible for the spectator. The spectator is required to actively engage with, and experience, the history unfolding on screen, if they are to attempt to decipher which time frame they are being shown. The ambiguity of historical images is highlighted in the practice; *do you see what I see?*

A significant development in film studies over the last fifteen years or so has seen the growing preoccupation with memory, nostalgia, and the recourse to historical archive. This follows the dramatic impact of global technologies on defining personal experience and identity. When describing how a national identity is constructed, film memory and nostalgia are inextricably linked to that process. But they need not be seen as regressive, or limiting models within which to explore this theme of identity.

Pam Cook, in her book *Screening the past: memory and nostalgia in cinema* (2005), writes that:

‘Fantasy, forgetfulness, and the distortion of linear time are thus built into the memory narration, and form part of the viewers’ experience, encouraging spectators to perceive memory as a transformative process rather than an accurate retrieval of the past’

(Cook, 2005, p. 7).

While exploring the theme of national identity through the moving image in this thesis, a



thorough investigation that allows for an engagement with its past (how Irish identity is represented historically) that also acknowledges the input of changing political agendas (how changes in the North with the peace process have reflected on the representation of national Irish identity) is required. The academic Thomas Elsaesser reminds us of this when he writes:

‘A strong national cinema must feed on its predecessors and thus stand in vampire relation to what has gone before. Identity... in cinema remains connected to questions of narrative, the art of repetition and recognition’ (Elsaesser, 2004, p. 262).

For Dr. Martin and I, we have become the archivists of our own communities’ idiosyncrasies. The term that encapsulates this is: *Alltags ge schichte*, which can be translated as *everyday history* and derives from the German ‘Alltag’, meaning everyday life. For me any rethinking of cultural representation must consider the field of ethnography.

Catherine Russell, in her book *Experimental Ethnography* (1999), argues that a subversive ethnography, as a mode of practice, can challenge various structures of sexism or imperialism that are often inscribed either explicitly or implicitly in forms of cultural representation. Russell writes that:

‘Once ethnography is understood as a discursive structure, its affinities with filmic ontologies of memorialisation, redemption, and loss become a rich source of allegorical possibility’ (Russell, 1999, p. xviii).

For Elsaesser, documentary or visual ethnography adds ‘a new dimension to memory, connecting the speaking subject to both temporality and mortality’ (Elsaesser, 1999).

The difficulty when attempting to capture the past through film is that, in using the media as material evidence, issues are raised about history’s relationship to truth and reality. These issues of truth are tied in with the fundamental aspect of modernity, where personal, cultural and national identities compete on so many intersecting levels.

When thinking about how the archive could be hiding a *false construction* or memory within it, I was reminded of an article I read a number of years ago, entitled *One train may be hiding another: private history, memory and national identity*, by the academic Thomas Elsaesser. In the article he considers the possibility of another, alternative archive, being obscured within the Archive, where this *other* archive is forgotten because of the more dominant historical reading of the past. Elsaesser engages with the idea of identity-politics, where no identity can be assumed or given, and the identity-politic he highlights is that of *memory*. He writes:

‘As history evaporates, becoming in the process the very signifier of the inauthentic, the false and the falsifiable, memory has gained in status, as the repository of genuine experience’ (Elsaesser, 1999).

To expose the notion of an erroneous memory, and the difficulty this throws up for the archive as a site of truth and stability, we now look to the documentary: *Settela, gesicht van het verleden* (1994) [*Settela, face of the past*], by Dutch filmmaker Cherry Duyns. It is a film about *het meisje* (the girl). The image of the girl in question is a still photograph taken from archival footage shot in the Netherlands by a German commandant as evidence of his exploits during WWII. The photograph represents, for the Jewish community, the atrocities of the Holocaust. The still of the girl is taken from a longer sequence of archival footage that shows the herding together of people into the Westerbork concentration camp, from where they would be transported to Auschwitz. The still image captures the girl in the small opening of a cattle truck just before the door is bolted closed and has been used widely by the media to symbolise this terrible period in Jewish history. However, only recently has the identity of the girl been discovered through the extensive investigative work undertaken by an historian and a filmmaker to give her back her identity.

By studying the leaves on the trees in the footage, alongside the chalk marks on the train wagons, and even the tiny detail of the boards that the side panels of the truck were constructed from, the researchers were able to determine that the film could not have been shot in February, as was previously thought, but must have been recorded in mid-May.

Therefore, it could not be the train that had taken the Jews to Auschwitz in that winter but was instead the one that took the ‘gypsies’ in Westerbork to Bergen Belsen. The false history held within the archive had been shattered and the truth of the suffering of the European Sinti and Romani was exposed. ‘One Holocaust, as we have come to learn at our cost, hides others, one image’s symbolic force may obscure another reality’ (Elsaesser, 1996).

## **2.2 An exploration of films and documentaries, which endeavour to capture the unfolding of time.**

This section is an exploration of films and documentaries, which endeavour to capture the unfolding of time. This section problematises the *given* historical context of the photograph or image. Hollis Frampton's 1971 film (*nostalgia*) is analysed in respect of his manipulation of temporality and his use of disjointed images and narrative to create new associations within the work.

While Cherry Duyns 1994 documentary *Settela, gezicht van het verleden* is chosen because of his exploration of the notion of an erroneous memory and the difficulty this throws up for the archive as a site of truth and stability.

The notion of any archive being imbued with a mnemonic *trace* is discussed. The trace of the image as implied archival memory, because the trace allows the viewer to imbue the images with experience, time, recollection and memory, the subjective experience.

Finally the notion of nostalgia is considered from a two-point perspective, restorative and redemptive. My production of *Return To The Sea* utilises the redemptive quality of nostalgia, where small details are illuminated and brought to the fore, in order that the minor voice can be heard.

To further explore the field of memory, and how it informs the construction of identity, it is necessary to take a closer look at a number of artist's films and documentaries which endeavour to capture the unfolding of time and which explore the use of memory.

In 1971, the photographer and filmmaker, Hollis Frampton, made a film called (*nostalgia*). The film becomes a device for the filmmaker in which to make time visible. The parenthesis of the title (*nostalgia*) is an intentional move by Frampton and depicts his struggle to resolve the conflicting statuses of words over photographic images.

*(nostalgia)* is a short film that charts the photographer's career over several years, from 1959 to 1966, while he lived in New York City. The film was made after Frampton had left New York. Its structure is simple; the opening shot sees a still Polaroid photograph lying on top of the ring of a cooker. As the film proceeds, the photograph catches fire and begins to burn. The resulting image is of the flimsy ashes of the photograph, floating up into the air, almost as though the film were in slow motion (even though it is not). The passing of time itself becomes animated. The film progresses in this manner - another photograph is laid down on the cooker and, again, burns away to nothing. But this time there is a voice-over describing events that, we presume, correlate to the photograph we are looking at. Twelve out of the thirteen images in the 36-minute film have voice over narration.

As each photograph is laid down we hear a collection of musings, an almost autobiographical telling of experiences relating to the photograph and the people in the life of the photographer, at the time the photograph was taken. The voice over is not, in fact, that of Frampton, but of his friend Michael Snow. The narration seems quite straightforward; details of when and where the photograph was taken are heard.

While we watch the photograph slowly being engulfed in flames, the anecdote too comes to an end, as we contemplate the decayed photograph. The silence runs almost as long as the duration of the narration that accompanies each photograph.

When the next photograph is laid down on the cooker, there is a moment of recognition of the image by the viewer, but we are given no time to mull over this recollection. The next anecdote, which accompanies the new photograph, begins and we, the viewer, are lost in its telling. As the film progresses, it gradually becomes clear to the viewer that the narration is describing, not the photograph seen on screen, but the story of the photograph yet to be shown. The structure used by Frampton may seem simple but it tackles, head on, the bigger issue of how to chart the passing of time in cinema. In this film, the viewer becomes aware of watching time unfold.

Frampton's (*nostalgia*) charts the inexorable march of time; where the lost time in Frampton's photographs becomes active. The film tells a story of people and places that are no longer *home*. The film is temporal and cinema, by its nature, is temporal. In fact, Frampton's short film confronts us with the very notion of cinema itself; time, and the film (*nostalgia*), illustrates how time runs on inexorably.

At a Q&A session at MOMA, NYC, the filmmaker himself discussed the urgency that makes getting a grip on the passage of time so fraught,. The session followed a screening of (*nostalgia*), in which he considered time to have its origins in consciousness.

'Time in the cinema is precisely as plastic, malleable and tactile as the physical substance of film itself ...it is the vast organism, which passes through all of us and through which we pass, called consciousness. The consciousness of the passing of time, the density, the sense that something will happen; that nothing will happen...Time is a name for something which is a consciousness' (Frampton, 1973).

Frampton's film (*nostalgia*) is a personal history unfolding on screen, but what is important is the overall structure with which Frampton manipulates the medium of film. Frampton addresses the problem of representing history in (*nostalgia*) by making the viewer experience history, rather than merely passively watching it unfold. To enable the viewer to experience history, Frampton makes the viewer aware of temporality in the images. Photographs are shown on screen while a story is being narrated, then the photograph we see on screen begins to burn. As the viewer, you immediately try to bring the two, words and images, together. But as you try to fit the story being narrated to the image, the image then becomes impossible to read. The viewer, being told the story while looking at one photograph, is compelled to make a connection, but a connection is ultimately impossible, as the story and image do not match.

The juxtaposition of word and image, their fraught coexistence in (*nostalgia*), presents to the viewer a visual representation of the difficulties inherent in the construction of history. Here, the mismatch of word and image, representing the past and the present, questions the accuracy of some historical texts that accompany images.

Whether the viewer likes it or not, the linear force of the film pushes us into the future. The burning photograph can be seen as a symbol of the present that is actively transformed into the past by its very burning.

The temporality of the film is related to the time contained within the photographs. Photographs are understood to represent a true evidentiary reading of history. So to awaken the transformative ability in the photograph, an active engagement with one's historical past may help to generate alternative outcomes for one's future.

Walter Benjamin refers to this need to explode the notion of one true history when describing his *Arcades Project* (1927). He compares his working method, 'to the process of splitting the atom...(which) liberates the enormous energies of history that are bound up in the 'once upon a time' of classical historiography. The history that showed things 'as they really were' was the strongest narcotic of the century' (Benjamin, 1999, p. 463).

Frampton's photographs in (*nostalgia*) may be chronological, but for Frampton, temporality is a dimension to be manipulated. Linear time in his film is in a state of flux. We begin to make associations between the disjointed images and narrative, even knowing as we do eventually, that they are in fact mismatched. Knowing the image and text are disjointed, we try then to remember the story and fix it to the following photograph. The weight and importance given to narrative is shown here.

Once a photograph is placed in front of a stranger, if the viewer is not familiar with what they are looking at, or doesn't know the photographer, the photograph immediately becomes ahistoric. It becomes incredibly difficult for a person to *not* believe a narrative they are told about the image and take it as truth. The writer Heide Schlupmann problematises the *given* historical context of the photograph when she writes that: 'when photography records history it simultaneously annihilates every historical context' (Schlupmann, 1987, p. 103). Like in the case of the gypsy girl on the train in Cherry Duyns documentary *Settela, gezicht van het verleden*, once a single reading of history is placed on a photograph or onto an archive film, it may simultaneously destroy the other minor histories that exist alongside the dominant reading of the historical moment.

However Frampton's (*nostalgia*) releases the photographs from their fixed narrative, making any meaning-making almost impossible. There are many layers of time in Frampton's film, multiple pasts that exist, both in the photographs, and in the narrative. Frampton in his film wants to shake up the notion of a continuous linear historical time. The film extracts images from fixed historical time and holds them, for an instant, in the present. This process enables a new reading of the image, before it once more turns to ash and is replaced.

The writer Svetlana Boym examines the notion of nostalgia from a two-point perspective. Boym distinguishes between the two possible forms of nostalgia that, for her, are 'restorative' and 'redemptive' nostalgia. Restorative nostalgia, Boym believes, is bound up in limiting nationalistic traits, consumed with linear history and finding origins in the past. For example, a national flag exists once a certain battle has been won and it thus symbolises the true dominant recourse to history one must follow. But this leaves little room for the minor voice that existed simultaneously to be heard. Redemptive nostalgia, on the other hand, is concerned with nuanced details and associations, rather than the grand symbol (Boym, 2001, p.xiii-iv).

My practice attempts to utilise the *redemptive* quality of nostalgia, where small details are illuminated and brought to the fore, so that the minor voice can be heard. In its superimposition of two images - past and present- the practice enables the past to feature in our consciousness. The mnemonic traces of our past (that surround our daily present) become animated. It is the intention of the practice to unearth these details, to create an instance in film to enable these fragments of our past to be highlighted, if only for a moment, in the consciousness of the viewer; before they too turn to ash.

A recurrent theme within debates surrounding film and photography is the notion of the *trace* or the *imprint* of the image, the notion of the trace refers to an implied archival memory within the mediums. Filmmakers' and video artists' approaches to historical experience are perhaps not only about the ontology of film and photography, but also a reflection on the testimonial function, and historical value, of the moving image as archive memory. But the notion of the *trace* goes beyond the materiality of the *imprint*, Malin



Whalberg explores the conceptual relation between ‘the trace’ and ‘archive memory’ and distinguishes the traits of the *trace*:

‘The *trace* opens up to time-experience and recollection; it designates the transcendental impact of the image-memory, the aporia of memory and imagination, the now of reminiscence, and the then and there of historical referent’ (Whalberg, 2008, p.xiv).

Whalberg highlights how the moving image (particularly nonfiction film) is enmeshed with social memory and historical figures, and draws attention to the cultural significance of the images’ imprint as a trace of the past.

For the documentarist, as for an historian, there is a process of creative bricolage when correlating the different material being used to represent the past, be that photography, testimonies, archival footage or other vestiges. That these various material vestiges will always be imbued with a mnemonic trace, the image as archive therefore is equally a point of recollection and forgetting. Problems surrounding the use and reuse of photographs and moving images in archives focus on the notion of collective memory and cultural preservation. The time that has passed between the footage being shot and the viewer looking at it is a crucial point. The images, in their reframing, can be placed in a very different context to that which was originally intended. Once again, the temporal context of the documentary is stressed, since the meaning of an image can change dramatically over a period of time.

For my practice, the ability of the moving image to be reframed and re-contextualised is important. The restaging of archival footage can provide an alternative version of history, and memory, in contributing to a contingent reading of the future that can oppose the official version of history. Here, the potential of the *trace* (as imprint of the past) to create an alternative historical narrative can be found in a new reading of the archive.

The critical theorist Homi K. Bhabha, in his book *The Location of Culture* writes, in relation to the subject of reframing of history, that:

‘in restaging the past it introduces other, incommensurable cultural temporalities into the invention of tradition. This process estranges any immediate access to an originary identity or a ‘received’ tradition...The ‘right’ to signify from the periphery of authorised power and privilege does not depend on the persistence of tradition; it is resourced by the power of tradition to be reinscribed through the conditions of contingency and contradictoriness that attend upon the lives of those who are ‘in the minority’ (1994, p. 3).

In the reframing of the *Martin Archive*, the *trace* of the past becomes animated by the disruption of linear historical time, caused by the superimposition in my practice of the new documentary images and the disjointed telling of past events. The *trace* acts as a dynamic transition between the past, present and future, because the trace, as we have seen, allows the spectator to imbue the images with experience, time, recollection and memory.

My experimental documentary practice may provide, then, an alternative telling of history, which reflects upon the constructed nature of narrative and the ambiguity of historical images. The creative potential of documentary film in expressing history and the past is ultimately imbued with subjective experience.

Nostalgia and memory is redeemed here, from a passive loss in history, to an active engagement with the past. It is argued that nostalgia and memory cannot be regarded as a simple device for idealising and de-historicising the past, but rather has the potential to reflect upon its own mechanisms, to encourage reflection in the spectator so that they can actively engage with notions of history, ambiguity and the constructed nature of identity.

### 3. The temporality of film

This chapter explores the use of time within my film practice. The documentary *Return To The Sea* could be described as a temporal bricolage. By this I mean I employ a montage technique of criss-crossing temporalities between the archival Super 8 footage and my own contemporary footage. The interlocking of historical and personal time enables a plurality of voices to be heard within the practice, contesting any dominant constructed historical linear narrative.

Gilles Deleuze's labyrinthine model of time is also analysed in reference to my practice. Deleuze's model of time enables there to be within my practice, multiple narratives (and voices) present concurrently. In this regards any acceptance of the stability of truth, or a linear reading of history is disrupted.

'we constitute a continuum of fragments of different ages; we make use of transformations which take place between two sheets (of time) to constitute a sheet *of* transformation...which invents a kind of transverse continuity of communication between several sheets, and weaves a network of non-localisable relations between them. In this way we extract non-chronological time...at once a past and always to come' (Deleuze, 2005, p. 123).

My own moving-image practice is a temporal bricolage of filmic images, which act as a point of departure for a dialogue between archives from two different times. Time in the practice oscillates between the *Martin Archive* from the 1950s, juxtaposed with my own contemporary archive, which documents the present day inhabitants of Inishbofin in Donegal. The structural strategy of sounds and images on two different time schedules results in a temporal space of *in-between*, where the minor voice may become heard in the gaps. In 1898 Henri Poincare wrote, 'Whence comes the feeling that between any two instants there are others' (Poincare, 2001, p. 211).

The practice takes on the form of a jumbled, reversed time frame, where multiple layers of time occur concurrently. In the process, chronology is disrupted and the archive gains new possibilities that allude to the notion of a constructed archive and constructed histories. In the space of the practice, the in-archive (the unacknowledged archive) is illuminated.

‘The experience with time is direct but multifaceted; a succession of states that melt into one form. Related to this sense of time is the capacity to evoke memory, displacing a past into a present... Here nothing is fixed; all is only as construct. Here memory is a fiction of the present. The utilisation of codes that reside within objects to convey aspects of memory, are ultimately an audience’s own memory as a fabricator of narratives’ (Sleziak, 2000, p.2).

According to Malin Whalberg, as discussed in the previous chapter, the structure of time within documentary is problematised by the moving image’s interaction with social memory and historical referents. A person must move through time to retrieve a memory, an oscillation between past and present. A past memory activates the present, and our (reading of the) future is dependent on this activation.

The use of Super 8 film (both archival and present-day Super 8 footage) within the contemporary footage attempts to disrupt any fixed notion (the viewer may have) of the timeframe seen on screen. The installation becomes a construct in space and time. Here, images are simultaneously real and not real, challenging the viewer to make sense of the experience. The quick inter-cuts, and juxtaposing of the archival with the contemporary footage on screen, address the state of on-going change, and enable notions of identity to become more fluid.

For Deleuze, the cinema of the *Time-Image* (where all movement exists in time) portrays subjects who move in an interminable slippage between different layers of the past. Characters in a *time-image* film come to explore their own memories of the past, and their existence in it, as many different past selves. This process of what Deleuze calls ‘*crystallisation*’ allows the subject to slip into an unfixed past (the past that *is*, rather than the past that *was*) and to explore his or her multiple, and not necessarily true, pasts. Here, what is constructed, virtual or actual, becomes jumbled and any meaning-making becomes impossible: ‘we no longer know what is imaginary or real, physical or mental in the situation, not because they are confused, but because we do not have to know and there is no longer even a place from which to ask’ (Deleuze, 2005, p. 2).

### 3.1 The time of the image experienced by the viewer

This section explores the *time of the viewing*, whereby the image unfolding on screen requires the *time of our attention*. It will explore notions of temporality and time experience through an inquiry into moving image representations, from both film and video artists, and documentary filmmakers' work. The experimental filmic works I have chosen to discuss consider the archive memory of film and recognise the *time of the image*. Henri Bergson's theory of time will also be scrutinized in relation to the structure of my practice. His theory of *Duration* (as a trait of time) is multiple, connected and intersected with other durations. Each time is a succession of the other, not a separate existence, but as a compilation of one another. The disjointed narrative form of my practice derives from the modernist tradition of fragmentation and stands in opposition to classical narrative structures. Narrative in this case is reflexive and celebrates chance and randomness.

To fully understand the fundamental temporality of film I need to consider the time, not only of the image, but also the time experienced by the viewer.

Jacques Aumont argues that, when contemplating cinema and temporality, one has to distinguish between two possible perspectives - the time of the image (time within the image) and the time of the viewing, whereby the image unfolding requires the time of our attention. 'The *ocular time* spent watching a picture would therefore be separated from the *pragmatic time* of the image' (Aumont, 1989, p. 80). Aumont's theory considers the temporal aspects of film narration, such as the duration of events on screen, and the order in which they are shown. Aumont suggests that when the cinematic apparatus, 'emphasises the time in which things take place (their duration), cinema almost allows us to perceive time' (Aumont, 1997, pp. 29–130).

When looking at non-fiction films, one must not overlook the experience of temporality within documentary. At the same time, it is necessary to negotiate the problem of expressing time in non-fiction films, which as we have seen is entwined in the moving image's interaction with social memory.

A major concept within the work of Henri Bergson concerns the impossibility of

measuring *Duration*. Bergson believed that time eluded mathematics and science. He believed that, since time was mobile, the instant one attempted to measure a moment, it would be gone. 'What one measures is an immobile, complete line, whereas time is mobile and always incomplete' (Bergson, 1946, pp. 164–165).

Time, for Bergson, is mobile - a constant flow of moments that underlies consciousness. His theory of *Duration* (as a trait of time) is multiple, connected and intersected with other durations. It is the simultaneous existence of the past, present and future - in the sense that the present would not be possible without the past, as the past always coexists virtually in the present (and makes it possible), and the future is inherent to the present. Each one of them is a succession of the other, not as a separate existence, but as a compilation of one another. They exist in a functional and complementary way, albeit not in a determinant one. For Bergson, duration is unthinkable beyond any acknowledgement of consciousness and lived experience.

However in cinema the point of intersection is precisely between the space-time of the image and the duration in which both the film, and the time spent viewing the film, are embraced. The issue of time has been the subject of formal and thematic experimentation in film (examples of which are explored at length in the following pages), whereby the static framing of an event or gesture can stress the very length of a moment; where the duration of the shot and the sensation of time passing becomes the primary focus of the film experience. Within a corpus of classical and recent experiments in film and video, I explore the technique of allowing time to unfold onscreen, looking particularly at the work of filmmakers like Andy Warhol, Peter Gidal and Chris Marker among others.

The process of my own practice always includes influences from other film and documentary practitioners who are involved with similar conceptual issues; discontinuity, fragmentation, multilocality, self-reflexivity, autobiographical inscription and so on. Like the voices of the philosophers and theorists who resonate throughout this thesis, the significant voice of artists and filmmakers has been crucial for the development of my own practice. With the increasing concern for the articulation of lived experience and temporality, where narratives radically disrupt any sense of time and space, the thesis acts as a point of incorporation and employment of theoretical material, and visual culture, into

the translation of my own thesis and practice.

Carole Gray, when discussing research methodologies for artists and designers working in practice-based research, explains the dialectic model of inquiry that I have utilised in my PhD research.

‘Practice and theory are reciprocal. Critical practice should generate theory and theory should inform practice’ (Gray, 1993). This process of self-reflexivity (through the thorough investigation into my own and the *Martin* film archives) results in a critical inquiry through a questioning and reflection on these archives, which formulates a discovery-led practice that generates new knowledge.

### 3.2 The extended single shot and other methods

In this section the experience of time seen unfolding on screen is elaborated on. The concept of the *Time Image* versus the *Movement Image* in relation to differing editing forms of American and European cinema is extrapolated both within my own practice and within the work of renowned filmmakers namely Andy Warhol, Peter Gidal, Kurt Kren and the *New Wave* directors.

Firstly I want to unpick the technique of the *extended single shot*, as part of this process. The extended single shot could be seen as a description of many *actualities* of the earliest period of cinema, where a single shot film was the norm. The single shot actuality, epitomises the openness of film to contingency and chance, i.e. the famous Lumière brothers film *L'Arrivée d'un Train* (1896). The longer any one shot is held, the more likely something unplanned will occur, and this is the contingent event. Within my own practice, I utilise the extended single shot to produce, at times, a contingent reading of the island peoples identity, where unplanned events are given time to unfold on screen.

Andy Warhol's pop films are an obvious example of an approach to filmmaking, whereby the experience of time passing is at the core of the filmmaker's experiments. *Sleep* (1963) consists of one long take of John Giorno, Andy Warhol's close friend at the time, sleeping for five hours and 20 minutes. The film was one of Warhol's first experiments with filmmaking, and was created as an 'anti-film'. Warhol would later extend this technique to his eight-hour-long film *Empire*.

*Empire* (1964), runs for a total of eight hours and consists only of footage of the Empire state building. The exploration of experienced time (for the spectator) is exhaustive. As a film, *Empire* is a major demonstration of extended screen-time and duration, expressed by the unfolding of events in real time. Warhol's films helped to theorise the concept of cinema as a temporal event.

Time and the *cinematic event* is a major consideration in both the film work and writings of Peter Gidal. Gidal along with Malcolm LeGrice, is the foremost exponent of British structural/materialist cinema. He was an active member of the London Film-Makers' Co-op, from 1969, and taught at the RCA from 1971–1983. Gidal's own works are



interrogations into the formal aspect of film, with a particular emphasis on duration, tempo and editing structures. His films invite audiences to consider various aspects of the meditation between the real and the reel. In his most famous work, *Room Film* (1973), the artist's camera restlessly investigates a room in minute detail; there is no describable content, but instead the film is an experiment on the play of light, and its absence, an exercise in duration for the viewer.

‘It (unending duration) positions the viewer in a place of seeing, i.e. perception, without conflating that into knowing (as it is one extreme function, not the whole), without mixing the two up. The separation of the two underlies avant-garde film from Warhol on’  
(Gidal, 1981).

Correlations with Gidal's writings and my own practice hinge on his theory that transformations can occur in the filmic present, during the moment of perception, the viewer /viewing. He describes this as ‘the one-to-one relation between the viewer and viewed’ (Gidal, 1989, p. 6). This concept, for Gidal, posits a direct relation between the represented film-time and the time for the viewer in the viewing-context. In classical cinema, that of mainstream Hollywood, continuity editing is used to conflate time and portray a classical model of time. Here, a structure of unbroken linear narrative is used in an attempt to assert linear time. This form of editing, in its use of time-compressions (for the purposes of creating a seamless narrative continuum), is disrupted by the avant-garde. What is produced, according to Gidal, is a ‘piece of time, time fragments, which a one to one relation between the viewer and the viewed would demand’ (Gidal, 1989, p. 1). What the structural/materialist film-work had as its object was the production of film work that refused to allow the processes of filmmaking to become obliterated. If there is an edit or a cut, it must not be *hidden*, or become ‘subservient to an overriding structural shape or aesthetic form’ (Gidal, 1989, p. 3).

To elaborate on what is meant by the ‘one to one relation between the viewer and viewed’, Gidal uses Kurt Kren's film, *Trees in Autumn* (1960), as an example. For Gidal, rather than becoming a ‘variegated jumble of images or an impressionistic haze’ (Gidal, 1989, p. 6), the film instigates a specific one-to-one relation. *Trees in Autumn* is a series of shots; each

shot is of a tree or branches. The rhythm of the montage of images combines with the rhythm of either stillness or movement, 'dominating any references (narrative or otherwise) from the represented space' (Gidal, 1989, p.6). The method of editing used by the filmmaker is to relay one shot following on from the next at half-second intervals or 'bursts'.

In the film, writes Gidal, 'a shot becomes a piece of time...a montage of shots in every film is a construction of duration and continuance in the face of the viewer's attempts to grasp and arrest the seen' (Gidal, 1989, p.6). Any attempt by the viewer at definition and meaning in the film is thwarted as it 'refuses to fill those meanings with 'truth' or 'nature' or 'the real, *meanings are unmade as quickly as made*' (Gidal, 1989, p.6). Here, the meaning-making process is disrupted because each segment of the film, and each shot in the montage, places itself both with and against the preceding and the following shot. According to Gidal, 'the question of *anything* being held, finalised, (or) stopped, is constantly problematic in such a film' (Gidal, 1989, p.6).

This process of editing that produces short bursts of time fragments disavows any fixed meaning to be placed on the image. This is noteworthy to me as a useful tool, to be incorporated within my own practice. In the gaps of the edit, there can appear something *new*.

For Gidal, a historical process exists in the viewing of such a work. He suggests 'the importance of the history of each viewing is inseparable from the subject/viewer's own history (subjectivity), but not somehow determined by it. This gives the material of film a power, through which the cinematic event persists. It is in the manner described above that the shorthand 'one to one relation of the viewer to viewed', must be understood' (Gidal, 1989, p.11).

The dialectic of continuity and discontinuity, crucial to theorists like Bergson, operates on two levels within cinema. First, in the *gap* between frames, which is obliterated in the production of the illusion of movement (in cinema) and, secondly, in the *cut*, which is also often concealed through techniques of continuity editing. The increasing fragmentation and reconceptualisation of time (due to industrialisation and emerging technologies of temporal

representation such as photography and cinema) was prominent in the late 1800s. This was a crucial moment in the evolution of modernism. Theorist Mary Ann Doane suggests that for cultural theorists like Walter Benjamin, the cut was ‘*the* incarnation of temporality in film, and it constituted the formal response to the restructuring of time in modernity’ (Doane, 2002, p. 184).

The cinematic apparatus - cinematic vision -conceals the fragmentation inherent in it, whereby cinematic movement is deceptive in its concealment of the editing device, the cut. But avant-garde film work seeks to ‘defamiliarise this motion and time, to bare the device’ (Doane, 2002, p. 213). Doane posits the work of filmmaker Bill Brand in his work, *Demolition of a Wall* (1973), as an example in which the editing technique is illuminated. Brand extracts six frames from Lumière’s *Démolition d’un mur* (1896) and uses each frame as a singular unit. He organises each frame successively in each of the 720 permutations possible in their ordering, which creates a succession of staggered movements. The resultant work acknowledges ‘the temporal lapse, the *lost time* inherent in the cinematic representation of movement’ (2002, p. 213).

Cinema traditionally had to eliminate the clock as a record of referential time, because in cinema it was necessary to remove the temporal specificity of the image in order to produce the *experience* of time. But what is particular to Christian Marclay’s film *The Clock* (2010, screened at the White Cube gallery) is that it does the opposite. Rather than eliminate the clock as a record of referential time Marclay makes the clock his central protagonist by constructing the work from thousands of film fragments that reference time. The fragments are edited together by Marclay so that they flow in real time. The fragments of film express time either through the image of a clock, or when a character interacts with a clock, or a watch, or a certain time of day. The film explores how time and duration are depicted in cinema. At the same time, the viewer of the work experiences a vast array of narratives, locations and moods, within the space of a few minutes. The different film clips are juxtaposed to create the narrative of *The Clock*. The process enables time to unravel, and criss-cross, in numerous directions at once. Even while *The Clock* tells the time - at any moment, the viewer can look at the work and use it to tell the time, as the work is synchronised to the local time zone - it simultaneously disrupts any sense of chronological coherence. The film plays with audiences’ experiences of narrative in cinema by exploring

the codes and editing devices filmmakers utilise in constructing an effective illusion of duration. The film works to transform the notion of time within cinema. A viewer experiences time itself unfolding through watching a fictional event, or numerous events unfold on screen, at what is the same time as they are watching it in the gallery space.

Deleuze in his book *Cinema 2: The Time Image* (1989) introduces us to the concept of the time-image. He explores the differing editing forms of American and European cinema. The book categorises the formal ways in which cinema could illustrate the different conceptions of time, looking in particular at the shock that occurred after World War II and how this affected cinema. Historically, a country or nation moves through a process of transformation after a seismic shift within that culture. For example, after WWII, cultural expression within nations changed dramatically. *La Nouvelle Vague* (*New Wave*) cinema can be seen as a reaction to a post war world.

The works of *New Wave* directors, such as Chris Marker, Jean-Luc Godard and Alain Resnais, were clear commentaries on the state of their nation in a post war era. Each of these filmmakers experimented with narrative time in their work, moving away from what Deleuze categorises as the movement-image, the classic Hollywood paradigm, towards the concept of the *time-image* and its use of non-linear narrative. The use of fragmented and multiple narratives and timeframes was a key tool in the discontinuous form of editing that these filmmakers employed in their work.

### 3.3 An analysis of the filmic process whereby film narrative and time is disrupted

In this section the theory that both film and video have a creative and transformative ability to play with time and space is examined. Video-artists and documentary filmmakers whose works I explore, experiment with the malleability of the moving image, where a film's duration and rhythm is manipulated to emphasise different elements in the framing of events. What is explored is their creative approach to the time of the image, and the potential archive memory of filmic representation. This, in turn, illuminates meanings of temporality and time experience. Their use of disjointed narratives is reflexive, political, subversive and poetic rather than realistic. The work of filmmakers Patrick Keiller, Stan Brakhage, Peter Wollen, Gideon Koppel and Chantal Akerman are discussed in this context.

Briefly, let's outline an example from two of the above filmmakers to highlight the common filmic process whereby film narrative and time is disrupted. Resnais' film *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961) is famous for its enigmatic narrative structure. This surreal, dreamlike film fuses the past with the present in the telling of its ambiguous tale. The premise of the film is that two characters, a man and a woman, may have met a year previously. Perhaps the meeting took place at the very same mirror-filled château they find themselves wandering through in the present. Memory plays a pivotal role in Resnais' investigation of the relationship between the characters. Because of the way Resnais has edited the film, the temporal and spatial relationships of the events are left open to question. This makes *truth* and *fiction* difficult to distinguish in the world these fictional characters inhabit.

In Marker's seminal work *La Jetée* (1962) we witness the role of memory, the past and present, mixed together in a reversed film narrative. In the film, during the aftermath of WWII, survivors of a destroyed, post-apocalyptic Paris live underground in the Palais de Chaillot galleries. Here, the characters research the notion of time-travel; their experiments centre on sending test subjects to different times 'to call past and future to the rescue of the present'. Eventually, a male prisoner, whose obsessive childhood memory of a woman involved in a violent incident on the boarding platform at Orly Airport, is key to enabling

this journey back and forth through time.

In *La Jetee*, the notion of time unfolding on screen is brought into sharp relief when, in a film constructed of still photographs cut together, there is suddenly and unexpectedly a rare moment of movement. In a series of stills depicting a woman's face sleeping, static photographs give way to the movement of film and she opens her eyes momentarily. It is a shocking moment in the film for the viewer. This moment within the film marks the event of movement, somehow outside of time.

The exploration by these *New Wave* (time-image) auteurs of how to envisage time (as fragmented, overlapping, reversed) enables them to explore the difficult terrain of what is meant by national identity at a time of huge societal transformation. Working with a disjointed, non-linear narrative form of fragmented timeframes, they 'formally demonstrate a nation's exploration of its own 'national narrative', its examination of the national past, present and /or future in search of causes, and possible alternatives to its current state and existence' (Martin-Jones, 2006, p. 1). New Wave directors employ a technique of interrupting time and film narrative, which my own practice employs when negotiating transformations within national Irish identity.

### 3.4 Patrick Keiller

National identity explored through film experiments that utilise disjointed narratives can be seen in the work of British filmmaker Patrick Keiller.

His feature-length film, *London* (1992), is a portrait of a decaying city. In *London*, Keiller developed his filmic format of static camera shots, where images of urban decay, and other socio-economic signifiers, combine with a voice over commentary. The commentary in *London* is spoken, with a quiet irony, by Paul Scofield, as an unseen friend of the equally unseen (and fictional) character of 'Robinson'. The character of Robinson is presented as a reclusive academic, whose research evolves around 'solving the problem' of London and England. At one point during the narration of *London* we hear how:

*'Robinson believed that, if he looked at it hard enough, he could cause the surface of the city to reveal to him the molecular basis of historical events, and in this way he hoped to see into the future'.*

This narration is delivered over an image of the moving surface of the river Thames. Keiller's style of writing and filmmaking might be termed 'hauntological', which is an idea within the philosophy of history introduced by Jacques Derrida in his work *Spectres of Marx* (1993). The idea of hauntology suggests that the present exists only with respect to the past and that society, after the end of history, will begin to orientate itself towards the 'ghost' of the past. This is a vague term, one that suggests nostalgia for a non-existent or imagined past that still holds some resonance with the present. In the film work of Keiller, we can see, in his use of jumbled narratives, a past, present and future which occur simultaneously.

*'All day the phone rings. It could be Robinson  
Calling. It never rings when he is here' (London, 1994).*

*London* is an attempt by Keiller to map the city anew by reconciling it as the capital of a country in transition. It's 1992, and the Conservative government is in power, the IRA is attacking the city and any artistic voice is being crushed. As we heard Robinson believed

that the city could reveal to him the ‘molecular basis of historical events’ and help him see into the future. The narrator in *London* reports that Robinson uses a particular locale in the capital ‘as a site for exercises in psychic landscaping, drifting and free association’; if there is a minor voice to unearth within the city’s history, Robinson intends to discover it. Time is transcended in *London* through Keiller’s clever use of reference to the ghosts of the city’s past. *London* is a film that is dedicated to recording the city’s secret history. A thematic parallel with my own practice is seen in Keiller’s pursuit of penetrating the everyday, in reshaping the familiar (and not so familiar in the case of the IRA bomb) so that it takes on an exotic new form. The film changes the way you think about the city, and in so doing, fulfils Keiller’s aim to change the city’s own psychic geography.

In his recent project *The City of the Future* (2007) Keiller again explores the identity of an area, where a contingent reading of its future is ultimately tied up in the images of its past. In the exhibition, Keiller uses footage of cities at the beginning of the last century to interrogate where we have come from, and where are we going. In an interview with *Time Out: London*, Keiller explains that, a few years earlier, he had an idea that if one looked carefully enough at ‘films from the past’, they ‘might reveal something about the present and also, perhaps, the future’ (Keiller, 2008).

With the use of archive footage from the previous century, *The City of the Future* is a project that explores contrasts between the familiarity of the cities’ physical foundations, the strangeness of the past, and the newness of present-day experience. It is a critique of present-day, and possible future, spatial experiences. Keiller states that ‘by re-presenting these films as an exhibition, I hope to recover their modernity’ (Keiller, 2008), much as my own initiative in re-presenting the *Martin Archive* within my practice intends to recover their modernity and their relevance in any present-day reading of Irish identity. In the space of the practice, ‘the past- present becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living’ (Bhabha, 1994, p.10).



### 3.5 Stan Brakhage

When discussing the work of filmmakers who consider the manipulation of nonlinear narrative time as a working method within their practice, I must briefly acknowledge the major contribution to the field from US filmmaker Stan Brakhage. A much-used quote on experimental film criticism is the opening of Brakhage's text *Metaphors on Vision*:

‘Imagine an eye unruled by man-made laws of perspective, an eye unprejudiced by compositional logic, an eye which does not respond to the name of everything but which must know each object encountered in life through an adventure of perception’  
(Brakhage, 1963, p. 1).

This passage explains the major aesthetic strain in Brakhage's films, that of abstraction, as well as his belief in the liberating power of nonlinear, non-narrative aesthetic experience. This nonlinear approach to time and narrative has proved difficult to watch for many people. His film work completely rejects any continuity of space or time. Real spatial dimension does not exist in his films and events do not follow each other in relation to any time sequence.

Brakhage's film *Dog Star Man* (1964) is composed of five parts, which were brought together in one complete work. The film is silent, 75 minutes long and filmed in colour and black and white on 16mm film. *Dog Star Man* is a compilation of the filmmaking techniques Brakhage applied to a deceptively simple narrative. This is the narrative of a man (played by Brakhage), who carries an axe, with a dog by his side, who struggles up a steep mountainside and cuts down a dead tree. *Dog Star Man* is structured as a prelude and four parts. Brakhage has described the film as having a seasonal/diurnal form, ‘while it encompasses a year and the history of man in terms of image material..., I thought it should be contained within a single day’ (Brakhage, 1984). The images in the film move from complete darkness, to intermittent flickers of light, and then to quick glimpses of, what seem to be, unrelated images.

In *Prelude*, the first of the film's five parts, we are introduced to Brakhage's principal images and the formal techniques that will recur as the film progresses. Key images are the axe-bearing woodsman, a birth, a lactating breast, a naked woman, the moon, mountains and trees. The shots are brief and intertwined with other shots through the use of

superimposition and intricate montage. Energetic, hand-held camera movements create the rhythm of the work. The film is a rush of colour, texture, light and rapidly changing images that push the film forward and help engage the viewer in ‘an adventure of perception’, as Brakhage calls it. For the viewer, the significance of any of the images is initially hard to decipher. But through Brakhage’s use of repetition and the associations he builds up between groups of related images, graspable meanings, and the beginnings of a narrative, begin to emerge. Throughout the film the key images return numerous times, but they are always altered in some way. This is achieved either through colour or texture (being painted over or scratched on), in length and clarity, or by the way the images are juxtaposed with other images. The images then begin to amass multiple meanings - literal, metaphoric and symbolic- as the film progresses. Particular images and themes, which are introduced to the viewer in the first instalment of the film *Prelude*, go on to dominate in different parts of the film, but never to the complete exclusion of the other images and themes. The result is a film that is a play between the parts and the whole (of the images) and that reflects the theme of the work for Brakhage—the interrelatedness of all things. In the film, Brakhage created a deeply personal tapestry of constantly moving imagery where the liberating power of nonlinear, non-narrative aesthetics, formed a metaphor for the richness of the everyday experience of life.

### 3.6 Peter Wollen and Laura Mulvey

An acknowledgment of the major contribution to the field of discourse that surrounds experimental avant-garde film must go to Peter Wollen, who published his influential text *The Two Avant-Gardes* in *Studio International* in 1975. Wollen also co-wrote, and co-directed, a number of films with the film theorist Laura Mulvey, in which they fused avant-garde and radical political elements. For the film *Riddles of the Sphinx* (1977), Wollen and Mulvey rewrote the Oedipal myth from a female perspective. The film draws on the critical writings and investigations by both Wollen and Mulvey into linear codes of narrative cinema, and offers an alternative formal structure through which to consider the images and meanings of female representations in film.

In the film, the female protagonist, Louise, is represented through a fragmented use of imagery and dialogue. This is a method of disruption used by the filmmakers to break down the accepted narrative structures of framing and filming, used to objectify women in mainstream cinema. *Riddles of the Sphinx* constructs a new relationship between the viewer and the female subject, because the filmmakers present their protagonist through multiple female voices and viewpoints. The construction of the dialogue, through the different voices of Louise, her friends and fellow workers, brings an ambiguous range of meanings to the film, and no fixed identity can be attributed to her. This differs from the norm where an often-patriarchal, explanatory narration is laid down on top of the images. These *other* voices and images in the film question and disrupt pre-determined meanings and symbols of the woman. Her guises range from the mythical enigma of the Sphinx, to the artist Mary Kelly and Mulvey herself.

When discussing the film, Mulvey suggests that ‘what recurs overall is a constant return to woman, not indeed as a visual image but as a subject of inquiry’. This film is a site of inquiry, rather than a space for pre-set meanings and symbols, and has been a useful model for me when considering my own practice as a site for the disruption of the constructed notion of Irish identity.

### 3.7 Malin Wahlberg

As previously mentioned a form of manipulation of time within my own documentary work is the use of the *extended single shot*. In my documentary on Inishbofin, which is titled *Return to the Sea*, one scene portrays a man sitting outside his house on a rickety old chair, singing to camera which I described at length earlier in the thesis. But I wanted to mention again the use of the extended camera shot in this scene and the fact that the shot is *isochronal*, in that the second half of the take (which captures a group of women), is equal in duration to the filmed event of the man singing to camera. For the viewer of the piece, time is allowed to unfold. The duration of the extended shot extends the action of the frame, making the spectator aware of their intruding gaze and allowing time for the unplanned action to appear on screen- the contingent moment.

In her book *Documentary Time, Film and Phenomenology* (2008) Malin Wahlberg explores the use of the extended shot within documentary and discusses how it highlights the unfolding of time onscreen. Wahlberg cites a documentary made by Pedro Costa, called *In Vanda's Room* (Portugal, 2000), as an example of the extended shot in documentary. The film is based on a year spent by Costa in a poor district outside Lisbon, where he captured the everyday life of the protagonist, Vanda Duarte. The documentary is structured by these extended shots (where the duration of the shot extends the action). The result of these extended shots, which capture scenes of everyday life, is the stark documentation of Duarte's social environment. The slow pace of the shots, where often nothing is unfolding but time itself, becomes symbolic of the drudgery and inertia inherent in her daily life. Duarte is a confirmed drug addict whose days are numbed by cycles of waking, a search for money, drug taking and ultimately collapsing into inertia.

The three-hour film is one of endurance for the viewer, where scenes, almost five minutes in length, pass with nothing happening. The tempo of the film, and pace of the extended scenes, act symbolically as a means of representing the desolation of Vanda's life as well as the impoverishment of her district.

### 3.8 Gideon Koppel

The filmmaker Gideon Koppel investigates time within documentary in his film *Sleep Furiously* (2007), a work described as a love letter to the Welsh village of Trefeurig. The film records and pays homage to the village that welcomed Koppel's parents, escaping from Nazi Germany during WWII. In conversation with the programmer of the Curzon cinema in 2009, Koppel describes how the landscape of this small village is a character in the film: 'Very specifically from the outset I wanted the land to have the sensibility of having a kind of permanence within the film and a changing mood in the way in which a character does' (Koppel, 2009).

The essential method used by Koppel in his recording of this small village is temporal. He allows a space on screen for the slow pace of the actions in the documentary to unfold, akin to my own working methods. The initial shot of my documentary *Return to the sea* shows the inside of a now abandoned and silenced schoolroom. The schoolroom becomes a site of time, giving a space for time to unfold and portraying the passing of time. The image of the derelict schoolroom holds within it a dark foreboding of the future for this small fishing community, teetering on the brink of becoming silent also.

In Koppel's *Sleep Furiously*, we see an elderly woman going about her daily chores, hanging clothes on a line, set against a backdrop of rolling hills. Within the shot, a small instance is captured when the woman is seen whistling for her dog, Jack, and only the viewer is able to see the dog, just in shot to the left of the screen.

The woman's frailty is exposed to us in the subtle nuance of her weak whistle, and her inability at first to see the dog. At one level this scene is one of a very mundane occurrence, but somehow it feels intimate and the isolation of the surroundings makes you forget for a moment that there is a camera operator there at all. The duration of this brief occurrence seems extended for the viewer, because of our empathy for the older woman it feels as if the time it takes her to find her companion is exaggerated. It is an uncomfortable scene because our sympathies lie with the woman and we want her to be reunited with her dog. We, the viewer, become aware once more of time itself unfolding on screen.

The parallel in working methods between my own practice and that of Koppel's is articulated in our common interest in how *lived time* materialises in the documentation of simple everyday gestures and exchanges.

### 3.9 Chantal Akerman

Chantal Akerman's documentary film, *From the East* (1993), depicts people and places in unidentified locations in Eastern Europe. Akerman utilises a similar structure of long takes (the extended shot) within her documentary. She employs a fixed camera to capture the action at a particular location, but she adopts the technique of the extended shot, whereby the sequence continues long after action in the frame ceases. The entire documentary moves rhythmically between a fixed camera (where people move in and out of shot) that captures public spaces—for example a busy train station—juxtaposed with formal frontal shots of private spaces, and people in their homes. These intimate spaces, captured by Akerman, portray the cultural and historical aspects of the society where peoples' social class and family situations are shown on screen. Akerman employs a very self-conscious mode of filming where she dramatically stages the poses of the people in their homes. They are almost in a frozen tableaux, which highlights the captured time within the image. The exaggerated unfolding of time in the film is highlighted by the juxtaposition of the more frenetic public scenes with the intimate tableau of the personal space, emphasising the malleability of time within the documentary.

My documentary work employs a similar structure, where intimate static shots of people posing in their homes are juxtaposed with the moving frame (the activity of people moving in and out of frame) of the public spaces. The constructed nature of the portrait in my own documentary is exposed in a sequence that shows the setting up of a shot in a family home on the island. The shot is continually interrupted by requests from the sound operator for the woman of the house to speak up in order to be heard on the recordist's microphone reading. This plea is repeated a total of three times by the sound operator. The natural *real* time that captures the joking and laughing of the family at each request is in stark contrast to the formal posture they employ when they know they are being *recorded*.

#### 4. The 'Double time' of the Nation

In this chapter I will investigate the theorist Homi K. Bhabha's concept of the *double time* of the nation, which for Bhabha involves a performative re-thinking of the past in the present. Whereby a process of narration and re-narration is possible when the re-emergent histories of diasporic or post-colonial people disrupt the pedagogic view of national identity. This concept allows within my practice for a dominant official narrative (of history) that often overpowers smaller voices to be challenged. People within a nation are inventing and re-inventing the nation at every moment, changing its ideas of itself, as well as its institutions. In this context where the narration of the nation re-emphasises temporality and where a review of the multiplicities within a nation is prioritised the ability of a people to transform themselves from within can be glimpsed. Essentially the practice becomes a site of intervention in the telling of histories.

Andrew Higson in his essay, *The Limiting Imagination of National Cinema*, suggests that:

‘a stable notion of the national cannot fully or even adequately account for the fundamental role played by globalisation in much, if not most contemporary film production and reception. Now more than ever the national is fully imbricated within the transformative ... dynamics of modernity and transcultural contact’ (Higson, 2000, pp. 63–74).

The Donegal archive films must be viewed from a transcultural perspective. If the dynamics of modernity have touched on, and destabilised, the national identity of the people portrayed in these films, then the everyday gestures and emotions of the lives recorded - if thought of as belonging to the canon of globalisation - must reflect that process.

When discussing the construction of Irish identity, or a nation's narration, it is not possible to overlook the post-colonial reconstruction of Ireland. A theorist I have already referenced and who is integral to my inquiry into national identity, from a post-colonial viewpoint, is Homi K. Bhabha. The notion of the nation, and how a national identity is constructed, is a key concept within Bhabha's writing. The seminal work by Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (1983), will also enrich the development of my argument of how a national

identity is constructed. In his book Anderson sets out what he believes are the main causes of nationalism. He suggests that:

‘...an imagined political community is both inherently limited and sovereign. It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion’ (Anderson, 1991, p. 5).

Anderson’s theory posits that all communities ‘larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps these too) are imagined communities and are to be distinguished, not by their falsity / genuineness, but by the style in which they are *imagined*’ (Anderson, 1983, p. 6). This concept was important for me at the beginning of my research, because I was looking at how the image of Ireland and Irishness was created on screen, often by the wider communities of other countries and by (as Luke Gibbons describes) the hyphenated Irish, e.g. the Irish-Americans abroad.

I will also draw on the writings of Luke Gibbons in his book *Transformations in Irish Culture* (1996). Gibbons asks how it is possible to accommodate ‘these disparate legacies of the Victorian era within narratives of Irish identity?’. The answer for him lies in ‘post-colonial strategies of cultural mixing, and is defined by notions of ‘hybridity’ and ‘syncretism’, rather than obsolete notions of nation, history or indigenous culture’ (Gibbons, 1996, p. 171).

To progress the concept of time in the thesis, I explore in this chapter the theory of time, bound up in the construction of national identity. Bhabha, in his book *Nation and Narration* (1990), discusses the *double time* of a nation, a concept that posits the notion of nation as perpetually in the process of being narrated and re-narrated. The term used by Bhabha is ‘pedagogical’. The pedagogical entrenches notions of identity, whereas the ‘performative’ renews it. Although the pedagogical is apparently negative, it would be wrong to dismiss it totally. Instead, it would be more accurate to argue that there is an oscillation between the two. A constant revision of the concept of the national, in performative works, creates a space for ‘writing the nation’ anew.

The ‘*Double Time*’ implied in the title is multilayered. It refers to Bhabha’s ‘double time’



of history, the official line, the 'pedagogical' vs the 'performative'. The performative role of my own practice posits two time frames: the older *Martin Archive*, and my own contemporary archive, in which a constant re-narration and reinterpretation of the images occurs due to their fragmented and disrupted timeframe. It also refers to Anderson's theory of 'homogenous empty time', which is based on the idea that, with the emergence of the notion of nation, at the end of the 18th century, the simultaneity of people's existence was measured by clock and calendar. (Anderson, 1983, p.24).

A critical inquiry into concepts of time is integral to my own writing and practice, which considers the construction of Ireland's national identity. In my filmic archive of the community of Inishbofin, in Donegal, I am not seeking to deny or reject national identity, but rather to keep such identity fluid. In this chapter, temporality and a certain concept of time that resists historicism, will be questioned.

Bhabha believes that nations have their own narrative. This might read as an obvious statement to make, but is one which cannot be confused with the homogenising, constructed form of national identity. Bhabha discusses how, more often than not, a dominant or official narrative is seen to overpower smaller voices within this construct, especially minority voices.

Using Bhabha's model of a nation, being narrated in double time, allows in my own practice for marginalised groups to have a greater presence, thereby creating the possibility for a more expansive and inclusive rethinking of Irish national identity.

A restrictive view of the present problematically constructs its origins in ancient, timeless pasts. What I mean by a restrictive view of the present is when different rhetorical symbols that represent a nation's past, are called upon to legitimise the origins of that nation. But in the present these rhetorical symbols (be they wars, flags, revolutions, founding fathers) can be changed and exchanged, depending on the dominant political voice of the time. 'The language of culture and community is poised on the fissures of the present becoming the rhetorical figures of a national past' (Bhabha, 1994, p. 142).

This process of a linear recourse to history forgets and excludes certain people (those that

do not fit); this pedagogical approach establishes only one dominant view of national history and identity. The pedagogic construction of history is never the whole story. Other voices simultaneously exist and subsist, and wait to be restored in a future reading of national identity. For Bhabha, the double time of the nation involves a performative rethinking of the past in the present. A process of narration and re-narration is possible when the re-emergent histories of diasporic or post-colonial people disrupt the pedagogic view of national identity. The plural histories of gender, race, class or ethnicity create multiple temporalities and explode a dominant colonial reading of history.

The disruptive potential of Deleuze's labyrinthine model of time - his theory of flows of time between multiple pasts and contingent futures - can be glimpsed in Bhabha's theory. An imagined thing is not unreal. One could argue that imagined communities are simultaneously real and unreal, virtual and actual. Anderson sees the modern notion of the nation as a matter of simultaneity and this simultaneity is horizontal. What is meant by this is that each member of this imagined community is able to envision themselves as one among many, right here, right now. This simultaneity is synonymous with the advent of modern print. Newspapers are an obvious example of this simultaneity - where millions of people can read a story related to them in the same language, at the same time, on the same day.

'The idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogenous, *empty time* is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history' (Anderson, 1983, p. 19).

The nation is not fixed or linear but is instead in a process of *becoming*, changing with each multiple past that is made actual, with each re-narration. It is the idea that a nation can be read as linear and progressive that both Anderson and Bhabha contend.

My practice aims to emphasise that there still exist, or subsist, other voices - those that have been pushed to the borders of any dominant reading of history. In this reading, the present is seen as a continuous form of one *true* past. In my practice, these *other* voices must be called upon for a new reading of the present that seeks to push against the pedagogic reading of history; to interrupt a linear reading of the past where the repetition

of the past is accorded the status of official history.

According to Bhabha the ungrounding of the pedagogical in society by the performative can create a new temporality and a contingent reading of a nation. The performative is the process by which people within a nation constantly renew, by their actions, what it means to be from that nation, without fixed and restrictive identities. Only through a performative rethinking of the past, in the present, can the people of a nation renegotiate their own national identity.

The temporality of the nation is referred to as the ‘disjunctive time of our modernity’, where the nation is caught between ‘the shreds and patches of cultural signification and the certainties of a nationalist pedagogy’ (Bhabha, 1992, p. 142). My practice disrupts the discourse of the nation at the point of splitting the nation between a linear pedagogical reading and an active performative reading. Here, a constant need to renegotiate identity in the present is performed and becomes the site of ‘*writing the nation*’ (Bhabha, 1990, p. 297). The nation’s double movement and its intrinsic temporality is explained as follows:

‘We then have a contested conceptual territory where the nation’s people must be thought in double-time; the people are the historical ‘objects’ of a nationalist pedagogy, giving the discourse an authority that is based on the pre-given or constituted origin *in the past*; the people are also the ‘subjects’ of a process of signification that must erase any prior or originary presence of the nation-people to demonstrate the prodigious, living principles of the people as contemporaneity: as that sign of the *present* through which national life is redeemed and iterated as the reproductive process (Bhabha, 1994, p. 145).

On the one hand, pedagogy is telling us that the nation and its people are what they are as a product of history; but on the other, the presence of performativity keeps reminding us that the nation and its people are always involved in a continual process of change. Here, in the space of the practice, any static *true* reading of a nation and its past is constantly being destabilised by the people within a nation who constantly exceed its definition.

Between the restrictive and formal pedagogical reading of a nation and its past, the

performative introduces a temporality of the '*in-between*' (Bhabha, 1994, p. 145). In the practice, at the place of the in-between, a gap exists where an alternative can be seen. In the disjunct of the narrative, and the contemporary film images and in the editing of the practice, small deferrals in the repetition—in the gaps and through the layering of times—create a site where writing the nation anew becomes possible.

#### 4.1 Clarification of the term *in-between* as a conceptual position

In this section the term *In-betweenness* will be elaborated on which for Bhabha is a space in-between here and there, cultures and places.

*In-betweenness* can be read as a liminal space or an interstitial space, which refers to the position of the cross-cultural transnational. This interstitial space opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assured or imposed hierarchy.

The in-between space of my practice is a space where past and present overlap and merge (in the form of the double narrative of the archives) and where memories, experiences and longings are fragmented, jumbled and presented anew. This in-between space provides a terrain for elaboratory strategies of selfhood that initiate new signs of identity, in the act of defining the idea of society itself.

As stated the space of *in-betweenness*, is for Bhabha the concept of being in-between *here* and *there*, in-between cultures and in-between places. In his book *Location of Culture*, Bhabha describes this in-betweenness as a 'liminal space', or an 'interstitial passage', which refers to the position of the cross-cultural transnational: 'this interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy' (Bhabha, 1994, p. 4). Bhabha notes how 'we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion' (Bhabha, 1994, p. 1).

The *in-between* space of my own practice is a space in which the past and present overlap and merge (in the form of the double narrative of the archives), and where memories, experiences and longings are fragmented, jumbled and presented anew. I sought to create a sense of home; where identity and belonging is always in transition, dissolving and evolving again; and where identity is transformed, but where the core remains.

To elaborate on the term 'national narrative', in relation to temporality, Bhabha writes in his essay 'Dissemination' that:

'the narrative and psychological force that nationness brings to bear on cultural

production and political projection is the effect of the ambivalence of the 'nation' as a narrative strategy. As the apparatus of symbolic power, it produces a continual slippage of categories, like sexuality, class affiliation, territorial paranoia, or 'cultural difference', in the act of writing the nation' (Bhabha, 1994, p. 140).

Here, we see that the narrative of nationality is continually being displaced by other identities, such as sexuality, class and race, and that there is no end to this displacement. Indeed, we shouldn't desire an end, because that would be to accept a fixed and, therefore, reductive idea of any national identity.

The possibility of ungrounding the nation's dominance is most evident when the re-emergent histories of post-colonial or diasporic populations threaten the maintenance of the pedagogic view of national identity. These plural histories create plural temporalities and therefore enable plural readings of a nation's past and present. At the site of the practice the ungrounding potential of time is illuminated through the multilayered voices of the past. By the re-appropriation of the *Martin Archive* into the practice, a previously marginal community is illuminated in cultural production.

To disrupt linear continuous readings of history within my film work, multiple temporalities are jumbled together, interrupting chronology. By utilising this structure within the film work, I formally render the multiplicities in the society in a literal way, where past and present become indistinguishable. In the space of the practice, the double time of the nation threatens the normalising dominant narrative. The double narrative of the two archives creates a disruptive moment, which negotiates transformations in the national narrative. I will now examine other works in relation to this context, to uncover their use of temporal narratives to constitute a disruptive moment.

#### 4.2 The use of temporal narratives in the constitution of a disruptive moment

The methods employed within the practice that help reinforce the theoretical concept of *disruption* are discussed in this section.

The practice employs a discontinuous, jumbled, multiplied, reversed and repeated use of images. In this way the meaning-making becomes unstable and its fragmentary nature means a complete meaning cannot be affixed to the people shown on screen. The meaning-making gesture is one of *disruption*.

Below I will discuss the documentary film *Handsworth Songs* (1985) alongside the fictional work by Salman Rushdie *The Satanic Verses* (1988) within the context of exploring the voice of the minority. I am aware of the ethical dangers involved in placing a non-fiction documentary alongside a fictional novel within a theoretical argument. In this thesis I self-consciously sit these two unconnected pieces of work alongside each other only in terms of their similarities in exploring the voice of the minority. I do it because my exploration of the different mediums in which the minoritarian perspective is explored outweighs their differences. I do not however want the juxtaposition of fiction alongside non-fiction to cloud the discussion of the minoritarian perspective and hybridity that I hope will enrich my argument. Specific sub-cultural and indigenous traditions from within a peripheral community can act as a point of disruption within a fixed construct of identity and it is in respect of letting the minor voice be heard that these two works are placed together within the structure of this thesis.

The film *Handsworth Songs* illustrates the destabilising of national identity that can occur in what Bhabha calls the ‘double time’ of the nation. A national narrative must be reconsidered once a minority discourse is allowed to speak. The film uses re-appropriated BBC newsreel footage of migrant peoples arriving on British shores. The film was made by The Black Audio Collective, who reframed the footage in order to highlight the multiple origins of British national identity and to formally demonstrate the ungrounding of national identity. *Handsworth Songs* destabilises official national narrative in a continual return to, and reiteration of, images of the moment of migrant arrivals into Britain in the 1950s. This demonstrates for Bhabha, ‘the filmic time of a colonial displacement of narrative’ (Bhabha, 1990, p. 308).

The work of Salman Rushdie in *The Satanic Verses*, also explores how the minority (or migrant voice), comes to rewrite narratives of nationality. In the book narratives of Englishness are revised and rewritten alongside representations of Islam. The main narrative in the book tells the story of Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha, who at the start of the book fall out of an airplane towards the sea. As he falls Gibreel dreams of an alternate or parallel narrative, which is the story of Mahound whose character is based on the seventh-century founder of Islam. The novel's narrative models, which are drawn from a mix of Indian traditions and modernism, have an extremely disorientating effect, making it impossible for them to be reduced to a vision of 'homogeneous empty, time' (Anderson, 1983, p. 24). Rushdie embraces multiplicity, creating characters and stories flowing into each other, along with the recurring motif of blurring dreams and reality.

Gibreel is a movie star who is questioning his own public and private identity. But throughout the novel there is a restlessness in his quest to reinvent his identity, combined with his failure to do so in any final sense. Ultimately, this leads to his suicide. Throughout the novel, Gibreel remains attached to a pedagogical certainty about his identity. At one point in the novel we read the following characterisations of Gibreel and Saladin:

'Gibreel, for all his stage-name and performances, and in spite of born-again slogans, new beginnings, metamorphoses; has wished to remain, to a large degree, continuous, that is, joined to and arising from the past. [...] whereas Saladin Chamcha is a creature of selected discontinuities, a willing re-invention' (Rushdie, 1988, p. 427).

In Rushdie's novel, identity cannot be approached in the rigid, uncompromising way that Gibreel adopts. By contrast, Saladin's happiness is founded on a more fluid conception of identity. At one point in the novel two other characters Mishal and Anahita, declare themselves to be British, but Saladin believes otherwise: 'but they weren't British, he wanted to tell them: not *really*, not in any way he could recognise. And yet his old certainties were slipping away by the moment, along with his old life' (Rushdie, 1988, p. 259). But in the end Saladin, because of his letting go of his old certainties, is ultimately



saved. The novel's celebration of cultural hybridity is expressed ultimately when Saladin realises his own potential while watching a gardening programme on T.V.:

‘There it palpably was, a chimera with roots, firmly planted in and growing vigorously out of a piece of English earth: a tree, he thought, capable of taking the metaphoric place of the one his father chopped down in a distant garden in another, incompatible world. If such a tree was possible, then so was he; he, too, could cohere, send down roots, survive. Amid all the televisual images of hybrid tragedies [...] he was given this one gift. It was enough. He switched off the set’ (Rushdie, 1988, p. 406).

Ultimately the nation is narrated (in politics, literature, or through the media) but the process is two-fold: there is the pedagogical dimension that prioritises fixed historical truths, and then there is a performative dimension, reminding us that those truths are always open, and in fact are being subtly altered every day. People within a nation are inventing and re-inventing the nation at every moment, changing its ideas of itself, as well as its institutions. In this context where the narration of the nation re-emphasises temporality and where a review of the multiplicities within a nation is prioritised, the ability of a people to transform themselves from within can be glimpsed.

In a world of globalisation it is a misconception to say that identities are now post-national. My aim in the practice might be to destabilise stereotypes within the national identity, but I do not wish to create a homogenous view of an Irish society that is interchangeable with other nations.

Gertjan Dijkink states in his book, *National Identity and Geopolitical Visions* (1996), that ‘the world is a system of messages, but they are understood differently in different places’ (Dijkink, 1996, p. 139). This thesis seeks to incorporate a performative dimension - the minor voice - where the everyday production of national newness has to be recognised and encouraged.

## 5. The 'Double Time' of the Archive: Reframing the archive

This chapter will examine Jacques Derrida's concept of the Archive that posits the notion that the Archive hides the sometimes-false construction of the archive itself. The archive can be read as a false grouping together of certain things, people, memories, and ideas of nation to force them to fit into a highly constructed box. In this regard the archiving process produces as much as it records the event. In our political experience of the media one must consider how nations are represented in broad sweeping terms where the individual is replaced by a grouping of symbols.

There is an ambition in this chapter to stress the anonymity of found footage in order to provoke a critical reflection on the construction of history and public memory. The idea that personal memories interrupt the collection of traces, which make up an archive, reminds us of the alternative histories that found footage offers to any official version of history.

I will use the concept of time in this chapter as the structure within which to explore the notion of the Archive, by investigating the interval between the *time* of inscription and the *time* of contemplation. This is intended to highlight how our perception of the world is bound up in the images presented by our media culture and, in a broader sense, highlights how our perceptions, the politics of representation and power relations are ultimately bound to visual culture.

Filmmakers who explore the constructed nature of the archive in their film work are discussed in detail including Deimantas Narkevicius, Peter Forgac and Harun Farocki.

Jacques Derrida, in his book *Archive Fever—A Freudian Impression* (1995), describes the origins of the Archive or Arkhé as follows:

‘Arkhé, we recall, names at once the commencement and the commandment. This name coordinates two principles in one: the principle according to history, *there* where things commence—physical, historical, or ontological principle—but also the principle according to the law, *there*, where authority and social order are exercised, *in this place* from which order is given’ (Derrida, 1995, p. 1).

For Derrida, the Archive hides the sometimes-false construction or laws in place when the archive was created. He writes, ‘the concept of the archive shelters in itself, of course, this memory of the name Arkhé. But it also shelters itself from this memory, which it shelters: which comes down to saying that it also forgets’ (Derrida, 1995, p. 2).

If cinema stresses the impact of the photograph or film image as a trace of the past in the unfolding of moving images, archive footage acts as a material imprint of a trace of that past. There is an ambition in this chapter to stress the anonymity of found footage in order to provoke a critical reflection on the construction of history and public memory. I will use time as the structure within which to explore the notion of the Archive, by investigating the interval between the *time* of inscription and the *time* of contemplation. This structure will encompass an examination of this double space of time, through an examination of both my own documentary practice (and its site of presentation) and a consideration of other artists’ and filmmakers’ work. Through an inquiry into how personal memories interrupt the collection of traces, which make up the archive, we are reminded of the alternative histories that found footage offers to any official version of history. We read earlier in the thesis, in the quote from Pam Cook’s book *Screening the Past: Memory and Nostalgia in Cinema* (2005) about:

‘fantasy, forgetfulness and the distortion of linear time as being built into the memory narration, and forms the viewer’s experience, encouraging spectators to perceive memory as a transformative process rather than an accurate retrieval of the past...’(Cook, 2005, p. 7).

In my own re-working of the found footage archives, juxtaposed with my own archive, so-called dominant ideologies of capitalism or colonialism, must be overturned—or at least challenged—and must be disassembled, and reassembled, producing new configurations and interpretations that emerge from localised sites. I act as an archivist of my own communities’ idiosyncrasies. This notion of a practice having a transformative effect, and the ability to reinvent individual and collective subjectivities, is one that I hope, with the emergence of new voices, I can achieve.

In documentary, as in history or the archive, there is a process of creative bricolage, when

collecting the different material to be used to represent the past—be that photography, testimonies, archival footage or other vestiges, which will collectively invoke past histories. These various material vestiges will always be imbued with a mnemonic trace. The image as archive is equally a point of recollection and forgetting. Problems surrounding the use and reuse of photographs and moving images in archives centre on the notion of collective memory and cultural preservation. The time that has passed between the footage being shot and the time when the viewer looks at it is a crucial point as the images in their reframing can be placed in very different contexts to those, which were originally intended. Once again, the temporal context of documentary is stressed, since the meaning of an image can change dramatically over a period of time.

The Lithuanian artist and documentary filmmaker, Deimantas Narkevicius, explores the constructed nature of the archive in his film, *The Role of a Lifetime* (2003), the film is a visual expression of how to ‘document’ reality. The film intertwines three distinctly different elements. The first is the artist’s interview with British filmmaker Peter Watkins, who has lived and worked in Lithuania for a number of years. He combines archive footage with drawings of Gruto Park, where Social Realist sculptures from the post-war era in Lithuania reside. Finally, he adds the films of an amateur filmmaker, depicting life in Brighton, which had been deposited in the local film archives. *The Role of a Lifetime* is, in the words of the curator Andeas Gedin, a ‘meta’ film—a film that avoids the pitfalls of documentarism and, instead, makes the viewer become part of the process of staging the past. Narkevicius’ construction of the film unites these disparate components, relating sound and image, to produce a strangely compelling oscillation between the constructed narrative of Watkins and the archive images seen on screen. This structure is one in which the conventional visual rhetoric, of historical testimony is dismantled, and in its place is a search by Narkevicius for a working method that does not allow history to be subsumed by the normalising effect of mass media commodification and ideological assimilation.

The notion of the document, and what this entails, is a key subject explored by both Deimantas, and the filmmaker Peter Watkins in his own fictive documentary work. They both utilise the medium of film to explore complex and personal stories, against a background of the political changes that Narkevicius explores in his home country of Lithuania. Both artists share a profound scepticism in relation to images that promise to be

authentic representations of history.

Peter Forgac's collection of films entitled *Private Hungary* (1988), document both the shared and intimate individual history of the Hungarian and European past, through the use of amateur film archives. The film portrays a poignant history of families in the wake of the Holocaust. In his work the image and death are intrinsically linked. As is often the case with the use of anonymous home movies, the viewer is distanced from the images. But when Forgac reframes these 'other' home movies, and interweaves them with interviews and his own research, we the viewers, are allowed inside his world. In the case of the Bartos family, the anonymity of the images is eliminated.

The working method employed by Forgac allows for a space in which he leaves questions unanswered. Information is missing; details are left out, so that the archives are shown to be an insufficient trace of the past. The unfolding of private social moments, and cultural displays, is presented as a counterbalance to the larger official record. We the viewer, can relate to elements within what we are shown—smiling happy families joined in celebration of a birthday, a marriage or simply a family picnic—and we fill in these gaps with our own memories. In so doing, Forgac presents us with the potential for archive-memory within these amateur archives.

Forgac utilises the home movie footage of a Jewish amateur filmmaker, Gyorgy Peto, for his film *Free Fall* (1996). Peto had set out to capture the everyday life of his family and friends, around 1937 to 1945 within the context of WWII, unaware that he was capturing a world in Hungary that would soon be gone. Forgac in *Free Fall* uses the device of inviting the viewer into the inner world of the Peto family. Forgac achieves this by adding textual snippets to the home movies, which illuminate who is seen on screen. The text overlay alludes to intimate secrets, for example, on screen a woman Henrietta Krausz is identified as Gyuri's aunt, and the people in the shot surrounding her are named and their relation to her explained. In the next shot, we see Henrietta again with two other women, one of them identified as Gyuri's sister, Rozsi, who is married to Laci Osvath, the lieutenant. But the next text explains that 'Rozsi is secretly in love with Sandor Sugar'.

Events beyond what is seen on screen are shown to the viewer. The filmmaker uses the

relationship between image and text to create empathy between the viewer and the Peto family; we are now drawn into their world, what will happen to them in this historical context? Here, the time at which the image was recorded and when the footage is shown, in a post Holocaust world, is stressed. The normal everyday activities of the Peto family have a dark foreboding for the viewer, as the violence to come is known to the contemporary viewer. Forgac emphasises the visualisation of the gap between the taking of the footage and the impending destruction of the family, the temporality of film is highlighted once again.

As the film progresses Forgac begins to intercut historical newsreel footage into the family home movies. The scene of a summer holiday, shot by Peto in 1939, is juxtaposed with text inserted by Forgac reading, *'On May 25, 1939, both houses of the parliament accepted with a great majority 'the first Jew Law', proposed by count Pal Teleki'*. The contemporary viewer's knowledge of the historical outcome creates the sinister foreboding of the everyday lives played out by the Peto family; here image and death are intrinsically linked. What the filmmaker illustrates is the indicated future of the past we are watching on screen. With simple editing techniques, using sound and image overlay, a family scene has the audio of gunfire, the Nazi genocide is then played out in the mind of the viewer.

Malin Whalberg, in her book *Documentary Time, Film and Phenomonology* (2008), writes that: 'In film narration the trace goes beyond the material support of the imprint, making the image a contemplative site of intersubjective memory and imagination' (Whalberg, 2008, p. 116).

A clarification of the meaning of the term *trace* in relationship to (the photographic) *imprint*.

Whalberg's theory posits that the material vestiges of film are imbued with a mnemonic *trace*, this *trace* in the image (or the images past life) creates a method of connecting the past with the present. In the context of this thesis the phenomonology of the *trace* as opposed to its mere photographic *imprint* is cited as a critical reflection on the philosophical problem of the production of memory within the moving image.

Wahlberg clarifies the distinction when she writes:

‘traditionally the conception of film as a time-based medium...refers to the photographic base of filmic representation, the cinematic record of unfolding moments, and the experience of the sound-image as index. The discussion about indexicality is commonly marked by the confusion of the imprint and the trace; the latter not only denotes a material vestige of the past but ...In her re-assessment of film and indexicality, Mary Ann Doane comes close to a distinction, although she does not address the phenomenology of the trace. She argues that the standard reference to Charles Sanders Peirce tends to reduce the index to the photographic imprint, whereas Peirce himself would rather underline its function as a hollowed-out sign:

‘In Peirce’s description, the index is evacuated of content...It designates something without describing it; its function is limited to the assurance of an existence. Hence, indexicality together with its seemingly privileged relation to the referent – to singularity and contingency-is available to a range of media.’

...Originally, the trace has less to do with the materiality of the vestige, than with its uncanny presence of absence. The trace is a trace of something, and therefore it stands out as an intentional object whose mode of being is equivalent to its function as inscription of the past within the present...The recognition of the trace as a presence of absence is far more complex than a mere confirmation of the indexical status of a photographic image’ (imprint).

(Wahlberg, 2008, p.34)

Forgac creates for the viewer, a narrative that constantly transgresses the past, the present, and the future of the reframed amateur films. The film illustrates various ways of representing the past on screen, where the trace of the image and the image’s past life become a method of connecting the past with the present for the filmmaker. The films are a critical reflection on the production of memory in the moving image.

Marianne Hirsch, in her book *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (1997), discusses the universal quality of domestic photography and film, which stems from the practice of ideal self-representation, a family constructing a unified image of the past. Indeed, this masking of the tensions hidden within the constructed family photo can be a great source of material for the documentary filmmaker to explore, in the same way as the archive can mask hidden histories within its recollection. The archive forgets as much as it preserves.

Documentary filmmaker Harun Farocki addresses the different uses of media as inscription and archive, and the way our everyday perception of the past and present is manipulated by truth-claiming images in real time. His films and videos explore the connection between meaning and image, perception and the making and remaking of images. By reframing images, Farocki creates a web of reflections, where new meanings appear in the interstice between sequences that are plucked out of context and reframed. I have elaborated on Farocki's working methods in my description of his film project *Interface* (1995) that follows. Similarities with my own working methods can be seen in the use of the gap, which allows, by the juxtaposing of both archives, other voices (my own and Martin's) to be heard.

A seemingly haphazard and spontaneous act of association characterises Farocki's films and video installations. Editing, and the reworking of images, is key to Farocki's working method. He believes editing provides him with *Schnittstelle* (*Interface*), the point of intersection, which occurs between two images, and the interval between the time of inscription and the moment of recollection are indicated. The edit suite for Farocki is the interface between production and reproduction, human and machine, and between subjective recollection and subjective memory.

Thomas Elsaesser writing in his book *Harun Farocki: Working on the Sight-lines* (2004) describes Farocki as 'first and foremost an archivist' (Elsaesser, 2004, p. 24), because much of the material Farocki utilises in his film work is found footage from various origins. Farocki manipulates and reframes archival footage, which in turn de-contextualises them and a new meaning can be revealed instead.

In his activity of recombining and reframing images to create new intertextualities Farocki allows images to comment on themselves. The film *Interface* (1995) is a prime example of this method. In the film, two frames are in continuous communication with each other. The juxtaposition of the two frames in this film, overlapping as they do in the centre of a black screen, is intended to highlight the space between the compiled montages. One frame shows a compiled sequence of footage shot in Romania in 1989 just prior to the revolution, while the other shows Farocki at his edit suite table, his hands reframing the same image, commenting on the images shown. Farocki stresses the space and time between when the



images were recorded and when they are reframed and viewed.

A line in his film *Zwischen zwei Kriegen* (1977), can be read almost as a manifesto for Farocki's working methods:

'I have started to take photographs. One image, incidentally, is too few; you need to take two images of everything [that matters]. Things are in flux so much that it requires two images at the very least to properly register the direction of the movement.'

In an article for *Filmkritik* he elaborates on his use of this shot-countershot technique, which he suggests is the basis of cinematic thought and its temporal articulations:

'in the end, shot-countershot is the first rule, the law of value [...] Shot-countershot is such an important technique in the language of film because it offers the possibility of placing very different images in a series. Continuity, discontinuity: the series is disrupted, yet still progresses [...] Shot-countershot offers the best opportunities for manipulating narrative time. Attention is diverted by the back and forth, so that real time can disappear between the cuts [...]. I am trying to comment on this shot-countershot by taking shots from both sides. Placed side-by-side, they are meant to yield another image and that which exists between the images should become visible' (Farocki, 1981).

Farocki's meaning-making process is one of disruption and interception.

The notion of the photographic *trace* within documentary is complicated by the social context in which the image is viewed, and by the manipulation of the image by the filmmaker. In the film *Interface*, Farocki refers to both the *reel* of the film, and to the *real*, highlighting for the viewer the narrative of history as an organised reinvention of the past in the present. In the film, Farocki uses both repetition and reframing to question the linearity of historical time. This, critically, makes the viewer aware of the narrative function of the filmmaker and, indeed, the historian. His creative manipulation of images of the past into sequences that he then discards, only to be reframed in another context with a new meaning, stresses the power of the compiler. The process of compiling the film material vestiges of the past into different contexts, at different times, is akin to that of the historian.

To continue my exploration of time in this thesis, the next example of Farocki's work I

will consider is his film *Workers Leaving the Factory* (1995). This video is a compilation of both fiction films and actualities, which show the same process of workers leaving the factory in a multitude of ways. On one screen, Farocki begins by showing the original: *La sortie des usines* (*Workers Leaving The Factory*, Louis and Auguste Lumiere, France, 1895), while the other screens show similar shots of workers leaving the factory that Farocki has found in different film archives. He includes documentary footage as well as scenes from Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936) and Antonioni's *Red Desert* (1964). Farocki juxtaposes scenes from a number of these films, showing how the community of workers dissolves at the factory gates, making room for narratives about the lives of individuals. Farocki's manipulation and recontextualising of this repeated motif poses questions about the media and the reproduction of archive material, the hand of the historian manipulating the archive memory, and the *creation* in historical narratives, is evident in this work.

I want to refer to an extract from another of Farocki's films, *I Thought I Was Seeing Convicts* (2000), a media critique on the increased use of surveillance footage. It is noteworthy to me because of its reflection on the temporal within surveillance footage, and the notion of the trace within this contemporary medium. The part of the film I will discuss centres on surveillance footage from the high security *Corcoran State Prison* in California. The prison employs a sophisticated system of surveillance and armed guards. In this piece, Farocki reframes surveillance material used by the activist group *Prison Focus*, adding a new level to the discussion of the material *trace*.

What is seen, initially, in the first frame is the image of a prison yard; the next frame shows two prisoners in the yard and the text of the film states: 'They are only worthy of attention in exceptional cases'. The footage of the prison yard is captured by two cameras, which are shown in split screen by Farocki, who then adds textual notes to what is seen on screen. The next marginal note added by Farocki is 'An exceptional case: death'. The narrative of the film begins to unfold in grainy black and white images; we see a man enter the frame and begin to kick someone just off camera; the fight unfolds beyond the left corner of the image, making it hard to decipher exactly what is happening. Farocki adds another text note: 'Bystanders run for cover'. In every frame we can clearly see the time and date of when the footage was shot on the left hand corner of the frame. Suddenly the violence moves into frame and the two men fighting are clearly seen on screen. Then

another marginal note from Farocki: 'White gun smoke moves across the image: A guard has opened fire'; smoke is seen on screen when another text note adds: 'William Martinez is hit'; a man falls to the ground in the frame. The text reads: 'William Martinez, aged 30, convicted of armed robbery, lies there for nine more minutes'. The sequence then cuts to voice over narration, which explains that because of the nature of the high security prison, it takes the guards nine minutes and fourteen seconds to reach Martinez.

The video results in a contemplative moment; the incident shown on screen was fatal. The sequence of nine minutes and fourteen seconds is too long to portray, so has been condensed in the video. Farocki's next text note reads: 'a process (of removing the body) we have condensed with this video'. The transparent manipulation of the footage by Farocki highlights the erroneous truth claim of supposedly non-manipulated surveillance footage. The marginal text at the beginning of the film which states 'They are only worthy of attention in exceptional cases . . . an exceptional case: death', stresses the unique exception—why this video footage is actually preserved, when often video footage can be erased and filmed over. But because of the fatality, the video was preserved and repeated endlessly through the media and during legal proceedings; its temporality taken as fact. Farocki, in this film, illustrates how our perception of the world is bound up in the images presented by our media culture and, in a broader sense, highlights how our perceptions, the politics of representation and power relations, are ultimately bound to visual culture. Derrida suggests that the concept of the Archive conducts the 'functions of unification, identification and classification', but which all must be paired with what he calls the power of consignation, 'Consignation aims to coordinate a single corpus, in a system or a synchrony in which all the elements articulate the unity of the ideal configuration' (Derrida, 1995, p. 3).

In the context of Derrida's quote, the Archive could be read as the false grouping together of certain things, people, memories, ideas of nation, so that they fit neatly into a box, which has highly constructed and fabricated boundaries and demarcations. The archiving therefore produces, as much as it records, the event. This is also our political experience of the media, particularly when one considers how nations are represented in broad sweeping terms in the media, where the individual is replaced by a grouping of symbols.

In *Archive Fever*, Derrida discusses the notion of a personal *inscription*, as ‘a very singular monument. In a reiterated manner, it leaves the trace of the incision right on the skin, more than one skin, at more than one age...each layer seems to gape slightly, as the lips of a wound, permitting glimpses of the abyssal possibility of another depth destined for archaeological excavation...it has, in appearance, primarily to do with *private inscription*’ (Derrida, 1995, p 20).

The archive of the singular private inscription that Derrida writes of is in the form of a dedication. It was written by Jakob, son of R. Shelomoh Freud, the grandfather of psychoanalysis, and addressed to his son, Shelomoh Sigmund Freud, on the day of his 35th birthday, in Vienna, 6 May 1891:

Son who is dear to me, Shelomoh. In the seventh of the days of the years of your life the Spirit of the Lord began to move you and spoke within you: Go, read my Book that I have written and there will burst open for you the wellsprings of understanding, knowledge, and wisdom. Behold, it is the Book of Books, from which sages have excavated and lawmakers learned knowledge and judgement. A vision of the Almighty did you see; you heard and strove to do, and you soared on the wings of the Spirit.

Since then the book has been stored like the fragments of the tablets in an ark with me. For the day on which your years were filled to five and thirty I have put upon it a cover of new skin and have called it: ‘Spring up, O well, sing ye unto it!’ And I have presented it to you as a memorial and a reminder [a memorial and a reminder, the one and the other at once, the one in the other, and we have, perhaps, in the economy of these two words the whole of archival law: anamnesis, mneme, hypomnema] of love from your father, who loves you with everlasting love.

Jakob son of R. Shelomoh Freid [sic]  
In the capital of Vienna 29 Nisan [5] 651 6 May 1891.

‘A gift *carried* this inscription. What the father gives to his son is at once writing and its substrate’ (Derrida, 1995, p. 21).

The substrate referred to by Derrida, that carried the personal inscription, was a Bible that Freud had in his youth. His father restores it to him, after having made a present of it to him; he resituates it as a gift, with a new leather binding. ‘To bind anew: this is the act of love’ writes Derrida (1995, p.21).

The archive films of Dr. Martin can be seen as his personal inscription. He did not record memories; he recorded his present. These films were shot at the moment of ‘pure recollection’, which will become actual for us, the viewer in a ‘recollection-image’. His archives recorded what Deleuze might describe as ‘presents which pass and pasts which are preserved. Time simultaneously makes the present pass and preserves the past in itself. There are, therefore, already, two possible time-images, one grounded in the past, the other in the present. Each is complex and is valid for time as a whole’ (Deleuze, 2005, p. 80). These Donegal film archives have been given to me, to re-bind (in my editing). They contain within them, the personal inscription of both Dr. Martin’s hand, and mine by what I have chosen to keep, and he has chosen to shoot. I will extract any hidden memories, histories or identities by letting these archives be seen in a new context. For me, as the present guardian of this archive, there can be no present without memory. Therefore, to understand a broader sense of contemporary Irish identity, we must look to the past to grasp the present, as both ‘are valid for time as a whole’.

Debates around the use of ‘amateur footage’ or ‘home movies’, at least after Patricia Zimmerman’s initial historical study of amateur film in her book *Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film*, for a long time have fallen short of Film Studies focus, which often, in the past at least, looked to national cinemas. But as with much of this thesis I steered my own research around the use of amateur footage from a local point of view. There is a nuanced differentiation between the term local and parochial. A focus on the parochial could be seen as an insular study of a small grouping of people or places whereas a study of the local, for me at least, is a celebration of local representations, a promotion of the interests of a particular locality, their priorities and customs.

Within my own research during the writing of this thesis I read a range of pioneering studies that have begun to shift Film Studies’ focus away from national cinemas towards amateur footage and home movies.

Amateur footage can all too easily be dismissed within scholarly arenas because of its technical limitations, an unfair association with amateurism or the problem with access to archives, but this cine movement must gain its rightful place within Film Studies annals. Amateur filmmakers have been the most active in the examination of either actual or imagined local realms, as they (much as Dr. Martin and myself within my own practice)

can achieve a certain intimacy with both the people and places in particular locals, and most often carry out their filming with a heightened sensitivity towards their subjects because of their intimate relationship with the people captured on screen. Nuanced aspects of local social practices (in my case in the Church scene, where a local priest blesses the 40<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary of two local islanders) can be captured because the filmmaker is often a member of the same community. Whereas a professional filmmaker's relationship with the community because of his or her temporal investment in the community will often not be able to capture the same intimacies on screen. Often the local people may be skeptical of the filmmakers' intentions or see them as potentially exploiting them for other gains.

Instead the indigenous/amateur filmmaker promises an enduring engagement often in the form of a sharing of the filmic outcome, in my case a re-investment in the community with a public screening of my documentary *Return To the Sea*.

The juxtaposition and analysis of the works of both the non-fiction 'amateur footage' of *The Martin Archive*, and my own fictive amateur footage can I hope suggest possible starting points for a debate around the use of 'amateur footage' and a theorisation of local amateur films within the context of the Irish national film culture.

Amateur home movies act as memory texts, a source of nostalgia for those captured on screen but also as much less-personal works appreciated by the outsider within the public sphere of a screening. My own incorporation of *The Martin Archive* within my own documentary *Return to the Sea*, which is intended for public screening, acts as a useful starting point for an examination of the amateur subjectivities in danger of being lost. Within the discursive framework of this thesis the status of amateur footage remains a continuous and unresolved concern.

Ian Craven, editor of the book *Movies on Home Ground*, a series of essays on the use of amateur footage, describes the use of amateur footage as 'a cinema of remarkable engagement scarcely confined to the 'backwoods', always evolving both in relation to an acute awareness of its own origins and immediate circumstances, and in response to incentives from shifting professional counterparts which constantly re-define the terms of amateurism's still cherished sense of difference'. (Craven, 2009, p.29)

Doane in her book *Emergence of Cinematic Time* writes that ‘the archive is a protection against time and its inevitable entropy and corruption, but with the introduction of film as archival process, the task becomes that of preserving time, of preserving an experience of temporality, one that was never necessarily “lived” but emerges as the counter dream of rationalization, its agonistic underside—full presence’ (2002, p. 223).

The intention in my own practice in the manipulation of the archives is to, in Farocki’s words, ‘excavate unexpected statements from this audio-visual archive’ (Elsaesser, 2004, p. 263).

## **6. A re-visioning of Irish national identity**

This section questions the often clichéd images that have come to symbolise the Irish on screen. I cite a number of films (from both fictional film and documentary film) and emphasise their importance as contemporary documents and their relevance in enriching conversations around the subject of Irish moving-image culture. My practice seeks to document a community while still challenging fixed or restrictive notions of Irish national identity that are so often engrained within the portrayal of the Irish people on film or in cinema.

This segment of the thesis investigates moving-image archives from documentary film, fiction film and television programmes in order to understand fully how the Irish are presented on screen. The role of my documentary is to act as my personal contribution to key debates in the evolution of the field of moving-image within Ireland. An attempt has been made with my own production *Return To the Sea* to give a voice to some sections of Irish society that normally are under represented within the histories of the moving-image in Ireland. My exploration of the history of Irish film production and the issues which the resulting films raised (politically, socially and culturally), allow me to question in this section where my own production could contribute to on-going debates about the future direction of Irish filmmaking,



## 6.1 Practice review

One aim of my practice is to engage in deepening the discourse and enrich the contemplation and conversations of Irish moving-image culture. It aims to contribute to the re-visioning of Irish identity by questioning the clichéd popular images that have come to be associated with it. My filmmaking practice involves documenting the Gaelic-speaking community in Donegal (North West Ireland) where I grew up.

When I started my PhD research, my initial steps focused on whether an indigenous filmmaker could create, and orientate, her work to reflect the local idiom and sense of place, without the work being compromised by the dominant media images of a fixed and restrictive national identity. My research began with a detailed exploration of a local indigenous film archive, the *Martin Archive*. I then combined these older archival images with my own contemporary moving image archive that I shot on Inishbofin in Donegal. My practice seeks to document a community while challenging a fictional sense of place and fixed notions of Irish national identity.

The starting point was to begin looking at my own documentary work, with a critical eye, to view it as someone from outside of Ireland might. If I had to define a country through its moving image archives, documentary, film and television—what would it say about that country? My own documentary work became a point of departure for this investigation. My research project looks at significant developments in the fields of film and memory, related to the archive and of notions of Irishness and engages with them, from both an academic and practice-based perspective. It is an investigation into current fiction and past fiction and non-fiction film work that debates the relationship between the (Irish) private memory, collective memory and the archive.

The personal and collective archives I engage with in my practice (both my own documentary work and the never-before-seen film archive) act as historical documents and my practice acts as evidence of my exploration of them. I do not intend to ‘set the record straight’ in the fields mentioned here. Instead the role of the practice will be that of acting as my personal contribution to key debates in the evolution of the field of moving-image within Ireland.

Because moving images and cinema are so closely tied to industry and economic development, these older film archives acted as a central point from which to look at the changing issues and culture of this area. What I set out to do originally with this thesis was to get a better understanding of Irishness or indeed ‘Oirishness’ in a global sense today. I wanted to try to strip away the sentimentality and clichés of what this means. But as my practice developed I realised that my work needed to be involved in a critical reassessment of the past.

My initial research into the development of the moving-image culture against a backdrop of the rapidly changing face of Ireland had the aim of allowing a historical engagement with the past that acknowledged the input of changing political agendas. This provides for the design of my practice, which is intended to stimulate thought (or, indeed, to invite argument) about familiar historical issues or personalities. It is a design that (it is intended) will highlight some fresh conjunctions and configurations in the interpretation of a re-visioning of Irish national identity.

An attempt has been made with my own documentary practice to give a place to some sections of Irish society not normally (or, at any rate, not adequately) represented within the histories of the moving image in Ireland. My early exploration of the history of Irish film production, and the issues which the resulting films raised (and their political and cultural consequences), allowed me to question where my own practice could contribute to ongoing debates about the future direction of Irish filmmaking. The significance of my own practice, from an appropriate historical, critical and theoretical context, is that it contributes in some small way to what is happening in Ireland at the moment: the building of a revitalised indigenous Irish film culture—that explores transformations in Irish identity from within—and for this reason I hope this research practice could be deemed a success.

## 6.2 Practice context: Where my practice is placed historically.

This section explores the relevance of early film and documentary work in the construction of how the Irish are perceived on screen. Explored are the early documentary films of the Horgan brothers from the 1910s and 1920s within a context of exploring the treatment of the Irish landscape and how Ireland itself was depicted. I will also note how this idealised imagery has been appropriated by Nationalist ideologies and by filmmakers like John Ford in *The Quiet Man* (1952). The overblown visual aesthetic of *The Quiet Man* was seized upon by the Hollywood mainstream; *The Quiet Man* in the context is used as an example of how Hollywood took hold of this imagery as paradigmatic of Irishness.

The section continues with an exploration of the Irish state-sponsored indigenous film industry. A re-appraisal of rural Ireland in films from the 1980s onwards is explored in a number of case studies.

- Neil Jordan's films and his re-engagement with rural Ireland e.g. *The Crying Game* (1992).
- Pat O' Connor's film *The Ballroom Romance* (1982) is examined in the same vein, in his projection of the misery of rural life in 1950s Ireland.
- Peter Mullan's *The Magdalene Sisters* (2000) is chosen because of its harrowing depiction of the power of the Catholic Church and its reach in rural Ireland in the 1960s.
- Syd Macarthy's *A Love Divided* (1999) is discussed because of its exploration of the Catholic Church at its most militant and in its depiction of rural Ireland wracked by blind prejudice and its portrayal of the overbearing authority of the Church.
- Kevin Liddy's films *Horse* (1992) and *Country* (2000) are used as examples as they compound the main depictions of rural Ireland as emotionally stunted as is the main theme running through these revivalist films.

These examples are cited within the thesis to help problematise the use of generalisations within any construct of Irish identity. They cannot therefore adequately portray the complexities of contemporary Ireland. My own documentary is cited as a portrayal of a society in motion that can, I hope, continue to reflect and contribute to the evolution of the

Irish image on screen as part of a questioning and discursive voice within Irish society.

The late nineteenth century created a large number of short films, collectively termed ‘actualities’ or ‘travelogues’. In an Irish context, these raise debates about the treatment of the landscape and Ireland itself in the moving image. These idyllic images have been appropriated by nationalist ideologies, but also by filmmakers, e.g. John Ford in his film *The Quiet Man*.

I began my research by looking at early documentary work in Ireland - the work of James and Thomas Horgan, who were cinéastes and shoemakers based in Youghal, Co. Cork. They shot a series of subjects in the 1910s and 1920s, which they compiled into newsreels. These show large numbers of people attending religious services and portray the people as members of both the community and of the Catholic Church. Other films in their collection specifically emphasise religious rituals and events, such as the multi-shot depiction of a Corpus Christi parade, or streams of female communicants in white dresses.

The Horgan material is a fascinating collection of views of turn-of-the-century Ireland. While modern, the country they depict is more community based, more rural, and more religious than the one recorded by the Lumieres around the same time in Ireland. The Horgan brothers’ films have many resonances and points of intersection with the unearthed archival footage, which I investigated in my own practice. Whereas Alexandre Promio, the Lumiere cineaste, who came to Ireland in 1897 and shot Dublin, Belfast and Cork, treated it like any other European city that he visited and filmed. This is not to imply that either view is more ‘documentary’ than the other. Harvey O’Brien in his book *The Real Ireland* notes that,

‘For the Horgans, Youghal was their own locality and was recorded for exhibition for locals. The Horgan films are arguably more ‘exotic’ than the Lumieres’ precisely because of their parochialism’ (O’Brien, 2004, p. 28).

In the early 1990s, two fundamental and interlinked factors—economic prosperity in the South and the Peace Process in the North—transformed Ireland, and a period of rethinking and reappraisal of Irishness followed. Ireland’s people, as Martin McLoone notes, ‘have fundamentally re-imagined their national identity, reassessing and transforming their sense

of nationhood, moving beyond narrow limits and traditionalist consensus. This process has given rise to a second cultural revival that has embraced the more popular forms of contemporary culture' (McLoone, 2006, p. 147).

Perhaps the most remarkable consequence of this new cultural ferment has been the emergence of a state-sponsored indigenous film industry. In April 1993, Ireland's most internationally renowned filmmaker, Neil Jordon, received the Best Original Screenplay Oscar for *The Crying Game* (1992). In Ireland, the then recently appointed Minister for the Arts, Culture, and the Gaeltacht, Michael D. Higgins (who incidentally was elected president of Ireland in 2011), used the occasion to re-establish the Irish Film Board, a film-funding body that had been set up in 1981, but that had lain dormant since the mid-1980s.

Since the new cultural ferment of the 1990s most reappraisals of rural Ireland are concerned with the shifting influence of Catholic teaching and Nationalist dogma on communities that were already wracked by poverty, or disintegrating as a result of emigration and enforced isolation. These fiction and non-fiction films are mostly set in the 1950s and 1960s and explore the oppressiveness of then president Eamon deValera's own vision of Ireland.

Jordan's films are major re-engagements with rural Ireland, by a contemporary Irish filmmaker, and they explore the legacy of Ireland's rural past and its continuing devotion to the Catholic Church.

One of the earliest films to explore the misery of rural life in 1950s Ireland was Pat O'Connor's production *The Ballroom Romance* (1982), which McLoone reviewed:

'The West of Ireland settings are beautifully photographed, but this ineffably sad and moving film also captures the lives of quiet desperation lived out in this visual splendour....There can be no romance or glamour in such a dying rural culture. This is a society populated by an assortment of ageing men and women, the sons and daughters left behind (or abandoned)....by successive waves of emigration' (McLoone, 2006, p. 150).

Three more fiction films that have followed in this modern revisionist portrayal of rural Ireland are outlined below:

1. The most harrowing of these films is Scottish filmmaker Peter Mullan's *The Magdalene Sisters* (2000), an Irish Film Board funded film, which looks at the infamous Magdalene laundries run by the Sisters of Mercy. Unmarried women who were deemed by family or church to be morally suspect were incarcerated in the laundries. The feature is set in the 1960s, as Ireland began its first period of industrialisation.

2. Syd Macartney's *A Love Divided* (1999) is based on real events in 1950s Ireland and depicts the Catholic Church at its most militant. The character Sheila Clooney, a Protestant, had married Sean Clooney, a Catholic and in accord with the Vatican's 'Ne Temere' decree, the couple had to promise to bring the children up as Catholic. When the time came for the oldest child to attend the local Catholic school, Sheila refused to comply and, under immense pressure from the local priest, she took her children into hiding. The Church then organised a boycott of the vulnerable Protestant community in this area of Southern Ireland. It is a hard-hitting attack on the Catholic Church, and its depiction of rural Ireland as wracked by blind prejudice and overbearing authority is politically powerful. The sublime landscape where their love story is set becomes a nightmare, and the effect is to raise fundamental questions about the whole myth of rural Ireland as an idyllic organic community.

3. Kevin Liddy's short film *Horse* (1992), and his feature film *Country* (2000) also compound the main themes or threads running through these revivalists films.

'rural Ireland is represented as an emotionally stunted and cold world, devoid of love, sympathy, and basic human communication. A palpable sense of cruelty hangs over these films and a sense of suppressed male violence, fuelled by frustration and lack of opportunity, inhabits their bleak landscapes' (McLoone, 2006, p. 150).

These films may be set in the past, but they are important contemporary documents nonetheless; they are 'Celtic Tiger' films. In many ways the films reflect the passions and obsessions of a young, vibrant culture, coming to terms with what it saw as a disabling

past—and maybe settling old scores with the repressive institutions of the past. The problem, of course, is that none of these generalisations are adequate to portray the complexities of contemporary Ireland, and massively misrepresent the country in all its diversity and changing configurations. O'Brien (2004, p. 14) writes: 'The evolution of Ireland in documentary is therefore as telling as the evolution of documentary in Ireland in terms of how we may understand the manner in which both are perceived.'

These filmmakers have shown little empathy for the rural communities that survive, and to some extent in their own way, thrive still. My documentary film practice aims to capture a panorama of this rural community, without either the engrained cliché of the earlier examples of moving-image culture, or the narrow-view of the total condemnation of these communities by recent revivalists. It is not so much the literal 'reality' of modern Ireland that is in question here, but the limits of discourse.

'In surveying films which have sought to examine Irish society and culture in the millennial years, we can perhaps reach an understanding of how history continues to be actively transformed by social, political and cultural forces including the media, but also how society defines the parameters within which examination occurs'  
(O'Brien, 2004, p. 238).

I hope my own documentary practice can be a portrayal of a society in motion, and that my work may continue to reflect and contribute to the evolution of Irish society as a questioning and discursive voice.

Within my own Practice, I am investigating whether a practice can have a transformative effect. Catherine Russell's Book *Experimental Ethnography* was a key text in my research because in it she refers to this notion of a practice:

'as a mode of representation that understands itself as a practice that is historical, that takes place in a moment, or across several moments in time'. Russell notes 'A subversive ethnography is a mode of practice that challenges the various structures of racism, sexism, and imperialism that are inscribed implicitly and explicitly in so many forms of cultural representation' (Russell, 1999, p.xii).

Harvey O'Brien states that a 'process of negotiation and transformation occurs with any

act of representation, evident even in some of the earliest visual depictions of Ireland' (O'Brien, 2004, p. 18). In his book *Real Ireland*, O'Brien quotes Nietschmann, who observes that people are interested in 'places' because each is thought to have a 'special individual character that influences those that live there, a character, which inevitably features in their acts of self-representation' (2004, p.18).

This notion of a practice having a transformative effect, and having the ability to reinvent individual and collective subjectivities, is one that I hope my own practice can contribute to. I see my own practice as being a snapshot, a record of a specific place and time in Irish history, It is a small cultural representation of these island people who are already fading into the past with the recent death of two of the main interviewees in my documentary.

The recording of a place, and how to record an impression of that place, is explored in the documentary work of Trinh T. Minh-ha, who was influential in my early research. Her interest specialisms are nation, community, first person interviews, and the commodification of traditional cultures, while also incorporating a *playing* with documentary form. Her practice often discusses the carefully constructed nature of interviews and this is echoed in my own practice when the recording apparatus, camera, sound boom etc. are often viewed in shot to alert the audience to the artifice of the constructed interview.

I have kept the shots in the beginning of each segment of my own documentary footage quite ambiguous, so as to solicit the viewer's sense of discovery, which may grow with means other than plot, story or message—means unique to cinema and moving image as a medium. Minh-ha also utilises this device in her practice. I read an interview with Minh-ha by Laura Mulvey about her film *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* (1989). In it she addresses the problem of translation in her practice:

'I am not really talking about the various meanings that one comes up with in translation, but of translation as a theoretical problem—the production of meaning, of identity, culture, and politics. This reminds me of a time a translator came up to me and told me that it was the most challenging task to translate my film, because in many instances there are simultaneously two texts, and which one to choose! So I said make a choice, and in making the choice she was very aware that translation not only determined the way the viewer would read the film, it could also not strive



for mere likeness to the original without betraying the latter. I wanted to achieve this in the film: to problematise both the role of translation in film and the role of film as translation’.

From an interview conducted by Isaac Julien and Laura Mulvey at the London Film Festival 1989: *Feminisms in the cinema*.  
(Pietropaolo, 1995, p.47).

This has influenced my own methodological approach to translation. In a section of my documentary I have left a song un-translated. I have done this for two reasons: to maintain a degree of ambiguity about what the spectator is supposed to be seeing or reading from the work; and because I feel it highlights the specificity of the Irish language—by not understanding what is being said, the spectator is put in a position of meaning-making, as the translation is not there to *tell* them what the documentary is saying. This is an attempt to use a lack of translation as a device to move away from ‘the eternal commentary that escorts images’, as Minh-ha suggests (Trinh T. Minh-ha in same interview).

### 6.3 Practice approach: Where my practice is placed theoretically

In this section I look at the work of filmmaker Harun Farocki in respect of his working methods, his use of the frame within a frame and his clever appropriation of mediated and archival footage. Farocki's work is cited because I utilise similar working methods within my own production. Within this section Farocki's strong authorial voice and point of agency within his filmmaking is highlighted.

The filmmaker whose practice has been very influential in the development of my own practice research is the German filmmaker Harun Farocki. Since beginning my research his work has resonated with me and his musings have been with me, to some degree, throughout the development of my own work. I was fortunate enough to hear him discussing his working-methods in person in February (2009) at the Goethe Institute. The seminar was called *-Three Early Films-* curated by Bart van der Heide, Antje Ehmann and Kodwo Eshun.

Re-assemblage is a key characteristic of Farocki's work that I have utilised in my own practice. The extensive archival footage in the *Martin Archive* that I have explored during my research is re-assembled within my own practice. In this, I looked to Farocki, a marginalised auteur, and his methodological framing and clever appropriation of mediated and archival footage. When I began my research, I had intended originally to use Farocki as a paradigm of documentary filmmaking. My intention had been to highlight issues and key communicants, in both Farocki's work and mine, to create a unique 'thumbprint' of filmmaking. But as my research developed my interests shifted somewhat and the portion of the thesis that was to be dedicated to Farocki lessened, but his influence as a practitioner to my own practice has not diminished.

Major concerns in Farocki's working methods centre on techniques of sequencing, material selection and association. For example, he believes that when making films from stills, 'you don't then compete with the omnipresent narrative-machine. When it's about putting stills into a sequence, to read them, a new kind of competence arises' (Elsaesser ed., 2004, p. 313). He could, in one way, be described as an essay filmmaker, but I feel this tag excludes major elements of his practice. Suffice to say that *narrative* is not crucial

within his work, but what comes across regardless is a strong authorial voice and point of agency within his filmmaking.

In his work, two types of documentary approach may be identified: the live and the recycled. Sometimes these anthropological and archival approaches converge, as they do in his film *Images of the World and Inscription of War* (1988), in which the movement of the live filming punctuates the commentary of still images. In the early stages of my work I struggled and deliberated over how to utilise the older *Martin* archival footage, and how to incorporate it within my own practice.

The archival footage *could* be read by a new audience, in this case an audience outside of Ireland, as cementing the many stereotypes engrained in the popular images of Ireland and Irishness. The religious parades, the holy-communion girls parading in their white dresses, farmers working with their sheep, all signaled the cliché of the idyllic rural landscape, replete with the images of priests, the fighting Irish and the beautiful cailín. The very images I started out to disrupt at the beginning of my research, the sentimentalised image of Ireland by the Irish Diaspora, the nostalgia for times past, the romanticisation of the rural Irish landscape, screamed out at me as an indigenous filmmaker and to any audience to which I showed the archive. This began my research journey into creating a new framework for looking at these images, to create a new form of meaning-making for them.

This led me to the writings of Gilles Deleuze, the French philosopher, whose work became instrumental in my structuring of the thesis. The thesis, and the practice, became a point of investigation into the notion that a new space can be created, whereby the documentary film work can help disrupt fixed and limiting notions of national Irish identity. I went on to use Gilles Deleuze's philosophy of time, as explored in *Cinema 1* (1983) and *Cinema 2* (1989), to help disrupt the meta-narrative of Irish identity within my thesis and practice.

Wolfgang Ernst, who works alongside Harun Farocki, wrote a paper called *Towards an Archive for Visual Concepts* (Elsaesser ed., 2004). In it, he discusses how the 'cultural memory of images has traditionally linked images to texts' (p. 261). Western culture has for the longest time 'subjected the memory of images to verbal or numerical access' (p. 262). But Ernst believed that an alternative form of categorisation and archiving of images

was required and his solution to this conundrum is explored in the following paragraphs.

The function of archives of images, such as museums or film-archives goes beyond the mere storage and conservation of images. Archives actively define what is to be known, remembered and what is archivable. By archiving what they believe should be remembered, they also determine what can be forgotten. Ernst writes:

‘Methodologically this implies leaving behind the contemplation and description of single images in favour of an investigation of sets of images. In terms of knowledge and memory, image archives pose the following questions: what new kinds of knowledge will exist exclusively in the form of images; what part of traditional knowledge can be transformed into images; and what part might just vanish altogether?’

(Ernst in Elsaesser (ed.), 2004 p. 261).

Ernst believes that what is needed is *a new image archaeology*, that involves the rethinking of the notion of images from the vantage point of the process of archiving. An urgent challenge for Ernst is ‘the addressing and sorting of non-scriptural media.... Images and sounds thus become subjected to algorithms of pattern and recognition procedures, which will ‘excavate’ unexpected optical statements and perspectives out of the audio-visual archive’. (p. 263).

For the first time, an archive can organise itself not just according to meta-data, but according to criteria proper to its own medium:

‘a visual memory in its own medium...after a century of creating the basis for audio-visual technical memory, a new cultural practice of mnemonic immediacy is about to emerge: the recycling and feedback of the media archive (a new archival economy of memory’ (Ernst in Elsaesser (ed.), p. 263).

This idea encouraged Ernst, Farocki and the media theorist Friedrich Kittler, to design a project that performs an equivalent to ‘lexicographical research using a collection of filmic expressions’ (p. 265). Farocki, according to Ernst, decided he wanted to create:

‘a kind of visual library of film which would not only classify film according to place and time of shooting etc but beyond that, it would systematise sequences of images according to motifs, topoi and narrative statements, thus helping to create a

culture of visual thinking with a visual grammar, analogous to our linguistic capacities' (Ernst in Elsaesser (ed.), p. 265).

While the visual archive has, for too long, historically been an institution concerned with a context that cannot be changed, 'this archive of (time-based) images' itself, according to Farocki, becomes 'dynamic and images get a temporal index' (p. 265). Farocki came up with the idea of a *Cinematographic Thesaurus* that would be an archive of filmic expressions. According to Farocki:

'the first close-ups in film history were focused on the human face, but the second ones showed hands. The close-ups isolate and emphasise hands', he believes that hands 'are designed for the language of gestures...like the magical gesture, the caress, that enchants or beguiles, offers blessing and often consoles. These gestures have a long history; in every contemporary gesture many of these past histories are echoed' (Farocki in Elsaesser (ed.) p. 274)

This practical technique of Farocki's was to be very beneficial to me when considering my own practice early on, to uncover as he suggested, the language of gestures within the images, to create a new form of meaning making from them and for them. This practical application helped open up the discourse surrounding these older archives and helped me to perceive them in a contemporary light, as Farocki suggests, 'in every contemporary gesture many of these past histories are echoed' (Farocki in Elsaesser (ed.), p. 274).

#### **6.4 Practice location: an overview of Inishbofin Island.**

This section situates the practice within its location with a brief description of the landscape and traditions of the island of Inishbofin.

The documentary *Return to the Sea*, which I made for my practice, was shot on the small island of Inishbofin or Inish Bó Finne in the Gaelic language (*Inish* meaning island, *bó* meaning cow and *finne* meaning white), off the northwest coast of Co. Donegal in Ireland. It is a mile long and half a mile in width and consists of 290 acres of land. It is situated a mile and a half from the mainland where boats leave from Magheroarty pier to reach the island. My family home where I grew up is a few miles from Magheroarty in the village of Falcarragh.

A few times each year during the big spring tide (or Rabhartach mór, in Gaelic) one can walk from the island to the mainland. There is a path of stones below sea level that is revealed during a spring tide that is called the Clochán. The islanders all speak Gaelic as their first language and it is only in the last forty years that they started to speak English fluently. The Irish culture is very much preserved on the island. There are four small villages or clachans, Baile Uachtarach, Garradh Bán, Clochán and Pollan.

Clochán is the centre point of the island and it is here that the pier slip, chapel and community hall are situated. All the houses on the island are facing towards the mainland and are sheltered from the northerly winds in winter. The island has a long history and folklore that would have us believe that in pagan times a white cow would cross the Clochán every day of the year to give milk to the island. A fallout between the islanders themselves over the cow resulted in the cow being turned into a large white stone. This stone can still be seen and is the only white stone on the island. It is said that if the stone is moved, the island will be submerged by the sea.

My father Lochlann McGill, a local GP and historian posits a different meaning for the origin of the island's name and suggests that the word *bó*, is an even older Gaelic word for Island and that the islands name translated is simply the White Island.

### Early settlers:

It is believed that people could have lived on the island before the time of Christ. The shoreline of the island is rich in seafood such as barnacles, carrageen moss and winkles etc. so it would have been an ideal place for early settlers.

In 1609 the Plantation of Ulster (the organised colonisation of Ulster in the seventeenth century by British settlers) forced people to move from their homes and land. Some moved to northwest Donegal to settle and some settled on Inishbofin.

The earliest recorded settlers were the Coll family from Gweedore (a village close to Magheroarty). They were farmers, who moved from place to place looking for good land for their livestock. Their descendents remain on Inishbofin to this day and are interviewed in my documentary.

### Leisure and Pastimes:

Oíche airneal (translated as night gathering) was a social gathering of neighbours in each other's houses and they were very common on the island. The radio did not arrive on the island until the mid 1950s and television twenty years later. People would gather together in a house to hear the news and general interest stories, and the few that could read English (these people would have worked in England and Scotland) would read them the newspaper of that day. The most popular pastime on winter nights was the gathering together of both young and old in certain houses to hear many of the older people (Seanchaí) tell stories of ghosts and fairies. These gatherings still take place most nights on the island where card playing is still very popular, as are dances (céilis), which are held in the Inishbofin community hall.

### Education:

Before the first national school was built on the island in 1889, the students were taught in ordinary houses and teachers would come from the mainland to teach them. The British government insisted that English should be the language of the national school however this policy had little or no effect on the island.

In 1947 Mary McGinley started to teach on the island when there were thirty-four pupils attending the school. The school closed in 1981 with only two students left. I have interviewed Mary for my documentary; unfortunately, since the time of the recording, she has passed away.

### Religion:

The people of Inishbofin have a very strong religious belief. There is a place on the island called Leac na hAltora (Mass Rock) where the priest used to say Mass during Penal times. The Penal times were a period in the seventeenth century in Ireland when laws were imposed by the British rulers of the time that discriminated against Roman Catholics. More recently on Sundays, when the weather permitted, the islanders would take the boat to Magheroarty and walk all the way to Gortahork, the next village over, to go to Mass. The priest from the mainland would only come to the island a few times a year to celebrate Mass. In 1965 the parish priest of Gortahork, Fr. Shields, decided to build a Chapel on the island, he raised the necessary money and the islanders built the Chapel voluntarily. Before Canon Shields died, he said he wanted the people of Inishbofin Island to carry his coffin part of the way to his grave. The islanders fulfilled his wish and carried his coffin. Canon Shields also wrote a prayer for the islanders in Irish and each house was given a copy. The prayer can be heard being recited in the opening sequence of my documentary *Return to the Sea*.

### Superstition:

The people of the island are very superstitious. The superstitions have pagan origins and



many are still believed today. One example says that if a boat or ship has sunk and the crew is drowning, another boat passing and seeing them has to leave them to drown. If they stopped to save them they thought they would be next to die (in Gaelic: *beidh a chuid fhèin ag an fharraige*).

Another example of superstition in my documentary relates to the tradition of collecting the first corn of the harvest and knotting it into a corn ring (Fáinne). The rings are then placed about the house or in the fields around the house to promote wealth and a fruitful next harvest.

This sequence is captured in my interview with Michael McFadden, who has also sadly passed away since the documentary was shot.

### Emigration:

One of the realities of the island is the steady stream of people who have emigrated from the island due to lack of employment. Most of the people who emigrated went to Scotland and England for the winter and then returned each summer for the fishing. The island today is only inhabited for six months of the year from spring until late autumn. Many of the islanders discuss this reality in *Return to the Sea*.

### The Inishbofin Skiffs:

The Inishbofin skiff (most commonly known in the North West as the *Drontheim*) was a sailboat used from the late 1800s until the mid 1950s. It was only used along the northwest coast of Donegal. The sailboat was 25 to 28 feet long and had 18-foot oars.

The McDonalds built these boats in Moville in Donegal. Each boat had a crew of four, and they were built to withstand the roughest weather, to travel long distances out to sea and to stay out at sea overnight. There were twenty skiffs on Inishbofin after World War II, when the population of the island was around one hundred and fifty. The sailboats were used for fishing salmon, lobster and herring and transporting great loads of seaweed from the shoreline at the back of the island to the pier. The seaweed was used as fertilizer in the fields. The skiffs can still be seen on the pier beside the Chapel on the island but have not

been used since 1953 when outbound engines and half-deckers (type of boat) came to the island. One of the islanders is seen describing his boats in the documentary.

#### Population decline:

In 1976 to 1980, people started to leave the island. They went to the mainland to live mainly in Magheroarty and Falcarragh. The younger generations were leaving and were not being replaced. A survey of the population of the island in 1828 showed that there were 43 houses and 252 people living there. In the census of 1961 it showed that there remained only 117 people, a huge decline.

There are a number of reasons why people have had to leave the island. The first one is the government, with no provision of funds for port facilities and no allocation of a doctor on the island it is difficult to sustain a community on the island. My father is the local GP to the island and lives in Falcarragh on the mainland. If there is an incident on the island he has to be helicoptered out.

#### Livelihood:

The main livelihood of the island for the last century or more has been fishing. In the 1920-30s nearly every house owner had a boat, net and lobster pots. The fishing season started with salmon fishing from June until the end of July. Lobster fishing ran to October, and herring was fished until Christmas. Fishing is the main reason the islanders come back to the island each year.

**6.5 Exploring the myth of a traditional culture:** Whether a culture on the periphery of society has a place within the discourse of contemporary society.

This section explores whether a marginalised culture has a place within the discourse of contemporary society. V.S. Naipaul's book *The Mimic Men* (1967) is discussed due to its description of a vernacular cosmopolitanism that measures global progress from the minoritarian perspective. This concept relates to the giving voice to a marginalised group within my own practice research. The section moves on to explore the potential for falsity within the Archive and Roland Barthe's theory of *The Third Meaning*. The theory is cited in relation to my own practice as it enables us to think about opening up *The Martin Archive* and my contemporary archive to their own infinite readings. By giving voice to this community within my work we can begin to move away from mere informative and symbolic readings of a society to this *third* reading, away from the obvious cliché to a re-visioning of this culture and its people.

Bhabha, when discussing V.S. Naipaul's book *The Mimic Men*, (Bhabha, 1994) notes that characters in Naipaul's book show signs of survival 'that emerges from the other side of the colonial enterprise'. He describes the characters as 'vernacular cosmopolitans of a kind, moving in-between cultural traditions' to reveal 'hybrid forms of life and art that do not have prior existence within the discrete world of any single culture or language' (Bhabha, 1994, p.xiii). This notion of vernacular cosmopolitans is an interesting starting point for unravelling the myth that a so-called traditional culture on the periphery of society has no place within the discourse of contemporary society.

Miriam Hansen notes too that the 'postmodernist challenge' has opened up a space for the understanding of 'alternative forms of modernism [...] that vary according to their social and geopolitical locations, often configured along the axis of post-coloniality and according to the specific subcultural and indigenous traditions to which they responded' (Hansen, 2000, p. 332). Could the site of the documentary films, this remote community of Inishboffin, be a place for negotiating a fresh view of Irish identity? Could my examination of indigenous archival films, be seen to contribute to the discourse of contemporary Irish national identity?

In his book, *The Mimic Men*, Naipaul describes a vernacular cosmopolitanism that measures global progress from the minoritarian perspective. These notions of minoritarian perspectives and hybridity can enrich my argument, which suggests that specific sub-cultural and indigenous traditions from *within* the peripheral community of Inishboffin can act as a point of disruption within any linear or fixed construct of Irish identity. My documentary work, and the appropriated archival footage, portrays a minoritarian population on the peripheries of society. I intend my work to intervene in the discourse surrounding identity, and post-colonial myths and stereotypes within Irish culture to emphasise in the research the need for an historical and cultural re-visioning. In this, I concur with Gibbons, who argues in his book *Transformations in Irish Culture*, that media representations can be a transformative force within society and can therein create a re-visioning of the Irish identity.

The appropriated archival images from the *Martin Archive*, and their juxtaposition within the montage of my contemporary documentary footage will help furnish an understanding of the identities of the community in the present-day, while the archival films will still retain a trace of their original intent. I want, in my work, to emphasise the archives' relevance in any contemporary reading of this rural society, while also exploring the role of memory and the potential for falsity within the Archive.

The Irish director Pat Murphy in her short film, *Rituals of Memory* (1979), suggests how visual representations can enter into and—in Luke Gibbons' words—'constitute memory'. In the film there is a juxtaposing of formal photographs of important occasions - of Weddings or Holy Communions - with informal family snapshots. Gibbons analyses the images themselves: 'Counter-pointed in the film against casual snapshots of informal occasions, these (formal) photographs invariably appear posed and stilted, unwittingly rigging the very past they are attempting to preserve. In this way, representations - photographs, film-drama, and fiction—can orchestrate any future readings of events: *The past is a way of acting on the present*' (Gibbons, 1996, p. 119).

The trace of the past is evident in my own documentary work, but the sense of what is lost, be that language or a way of life, is only apparent after we have seen the past in the archive footage. Therefore, any contemporary reading of Irish identity can only be properly

understood through the eyes of the past.

To elaborate on Gibbons' point that representations (of the past) can orchestrate any future readings of events, we must now consider that images of the past also have the ability to falsify what is recorded historically, and that this falsity can alter our reading of the present or indeed the future. The past has a way of acting on the present, in that what we accept as captured, historical or evidentiary truth can unravel and become unhinged with a fresh reading of the image in the present-time.

There is another reading of the *Martin Archive*, which I would like to expand on. While scrutinising these archival films, the material on the border of the carefully positioned shots (which await the 'action' to begin) has come to the fore. Barthes makes the observation: 'Once I feel myself observed by the lens, everything changes: I constitute myself in the process of 'posing'; I instantaneously make another body for myself. I transform myself in advance into an image' (Barthes, 1981, pp. 10–11).

These peripheral shots on the outer edge of the frame give us a more candid glimpse of the community behind the lens than the more formal posed shots. There is individuality to the extraneous images within my own or Martin's camera frame, which can be seen to illuminate Barthes' theory of *The Third Meaning*, or what he sometimes calls the *Obtuse* meaning. Barthes suggests that The Third Meaning is not articulate in language but is bound to emotion; it seems to close in on the touching, sensitive and emotional without precisely locating such conditions. Obtuse meaning is located within the filmic, within that part of meaning, which is not conveyed by the film, yet, which is integral to its existence as film. It arises beyond the informational and symbolic level, within the structure of film and cannot be 'conflated with the simple existence of the scene, it exceeds the copy of the referential motif, it compels an interrogative meaning' (Barthes, 1978, p. 53).

Therefore, we must think of the *Martin Archive* as having to be interrogated thoroughly by the eye. For Barthes the third meaning is 'pure, upright...narrative, it seems to open up the field of meaning totally, that is infinitely' (Barthes, 1978, p. 55). This theory enables us to think of opening up *The Martin Archive* and my contemporary archive to their own infinite readings. We can then move past the informative or symbolic readings to this third

reading, away from the obvious cliché to a re-visioning of this culture and its people. The obtuse meaning is, in Barthes own admission, hard to pinpoint. Take away the obtuse meaning and communication and signification remain. But the obtuse meaning cannot be described, because in contrast to the obvious meaning, ‘it does not copy anything, how do you describe something which does not represent anything?’ (Barthes, 1978, p. 61). Barthes suggests the obtuse meaning carries a certain emotion, sensitivity, ‘such emotion is never sticky, it is an emotion which simply designates what one loves, what one wants to defend’ (Barthes, 1978, p. 53).

‘It is clear that the obtuse meaning is the epitome of a counternarrative; disseminated, reversible, set in its own temporality, it inevitably determines (if one follows it) a quite different analytical segmentation to that in shots, sequences and syntagms (technical or narrative), an extraordinary segmentation: counter-logical and yet ‘true’ (Barthes, 1978, p. 63).

Barthes understands that the contemporary objective should not be to destroy narrative, but rather to subvert it, as I am attempting to do within my own practice. For Barthes, the Third Meaning structures the film differently, and it is only at this level of the Third Meaning that the ‘filmic’ can finally emerge. Barthes locates the obtuse meaning in the film still.

‘The filmic is that in film which cannot be described, the representation which cannot be represented...the film still, throws off the constraint of time...past-present etc. The still, by instituting a reading that is at once instantaneous and vertical, scorns logical time; it teaches us how to dissociate the technical constraint from what is the specific filmic and which is the ‘indescribable’ meaning’ (Barthes, 1978, pp. 64–68).

The role of memory in my practice is also relevant to the thesis. How much do we actually see and to what extent do we superimpose our own memories onto these ‘familiar’ shots of ‘home-movies’ (or onto any film we watch). Is there ambivalence at work when confronted with these images of ‘home-movies’? How much of the material is actively seen and how much is constructed? In a great deal of contemporary ethnography memory is seen as a shaping force that is dynamic rather than a passive image-bank of the past. This notion of memory as a dynamic force that can shape how we perceive our own

history, or that of others, is explored in the book *Theatres of Memory* (1995). Here, the author Raphael Samuel proposes that what memory contrives to forget is as important as what it remembers:

‘history composites...it integrates what in the original may have been divergent, synthesises different classes of information and plays different orders of experience against one another. It brings the half-forgotten back to life, very much in the manner of *dream-thoughts*. And it creates a consecutive narrative out of fragments, imposing order in chaos, and producing images far clearer than any reality could be’ (Samuel, 1995, p.x).

The screened film is a space where the constructed nature of memory, and memory as a dynamic force that can construct images and histories, is evoked. The film will consist of a quick succession of archival and contemporary documentary footage, which will facilitate a new reading of this community’s identity, through, as Bhabha suggests, ‘the ‘past-present’ becoming a part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living’ (Bhabha, 1994, p. 10). The practice (in its use of the *Martin Archive* footage) carries within it a trace of the past, with its disjunctive temporalities and its particular experiences and traditions, which become interwoven into the fabric of a new historicity of the Irish identity. Through this working method I place the spectator in a pivotal, fluid space, between then and now, simultaneously insider and outsider. From this position it is hard for us to fall back on the old clichés of Irish identity (the drunken, fighting Irish), not least because we can begin to make links with our own lives. We, as the spectator, cannot therefore read these moving ghosts or shadows on the screen as stereotypes, but instead we are made to think of each character as an individual.

Bhabha suggests that, ‘it is the trope of our times to locate the question of culture in the realm of the *beyond*’ (Bhabha, 1994, p. 1). Bhabha’s theory of the *beyond* or the *in-between* will help in explaining the idea of an interstitial space as the site of my own practice. The site of the work becomes an *in-between* space, where redundant stereotypes can be questioned and overturned, where linear and fixed historical timeframes can be disrupted, in the act of defining a society.

‘The ‘beyond’ is neither a new horizon’, says Bhabha,’ nor a leaving behind of the past...’ but ‘is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These ‘*in-between*’ spaces provide terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood - singular or communal -that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself’ (Bhabha, 1994, pp. 1–2).

The site of the practice becomes a space in which a society, or an identity, can be re-visualised, where personal experience and specific indigenous traditions enrich strategies of selfhood, and where personal antagonistic histories are montaged together and interwoven in the telling of histories.



**6.6 Fictitious vision of Ireland and its colonial past:** A close text reading of films that explore foundational narratives and myths in Irish visual culture.

This section explores how in the absence of an Irish film industry for much of the twentieth century we must explore how the image of Ireland on screen emerged out of the cinematic industries of other countries, most notable Britain and Hollywood.

The George Morrison's documentary *Mise Éire* (1959) is cited as an example of an heroic, nationalist phase of documentary filmmaking that went on to influence how Hollywood would perceive Ireland. The inclusion of John Ford's film *The Quiet Man* (1952) in the thesis relates to its overblown visual aesthetic and acts as an example of a classic Hollywood paradigm. The film is used as an example of classical cinema's use of continuity editing. Hollywood's use of the *Movement-Image* allows for only one linear narrative, one 'true' timeframe, and one 'correct' dominant narrative to exist as apposed to the use of the *Time-Image* in the work of Avant-garde filmmakers. The film problematises the use of continuity editing within Hollywood in opposition to the Avant-garde who utilise a discontinuous form of editing that clearly experiments with narrative time and non-linear narrative. Within the canon of the Avant-garde where my own documentary practice is rooted, film narrative and film-time is disrupted. This working method is experimented with in my own film practice by its use of two different time frames, both the archival Super 8 footage and my own contemporary Super 8 footage. The employment of multi-layered and discontinuous editing disrupts a model of time and allows the minor voice to be heard within any historical reading of Irish identity. Thereby letting the marginalised voice to be heard alongside any dominant linear reading of Irishness.

This section of the thesis will include key representations of the Irish on screen. I demonstrate the disabling effect of the dominant screen images of the Irish and render them problematic. A number of films are cited that both compound these images alongside others who actively deconstruct them.

Neil Jordan's film *The Butcher Boy* (1997) is cited because of its pastiche of romanticised and stylised images of rural Ireland, a picture postcard image that dominated representations of Ireland for decades.

Sidney Olcott's *Rory O'Moore* (1911) is used as an example of where many of these romanticised images are played out. Other films discussed include Robert Flaherty's *Man of Aran* (1934), *The Quiet Man* (1952), *The Gentle Gunman* (1952) and *Ryan's Daughter* (1970), which all employ a trope of clichéd images that had a detrimental impact on the representation and perception of Ireland.

Pat Murphy's film *Maeve* (1981) is given a close text reading because of the way in which it subverts clichéd images of Ireland to help confront the idyllic perception of Ireland head-on. This is examined in relation to my own attempts within my practice to correct perceptions of Irishness.

Ruth Barton writes in her book *Irish National Cinema* (2004) that, in 1993, the Irish government decided to rejuvenate the Irish Film Board, to promote filmmaking within Ireland. In the words of the Minister for the Arts at the time, (Michael D. Higgins) this was a key step with respect to 'whether we become the consumer of images in a passive culture or whether we will be allowed to be the makers of images in an active culture, in a democratic society' (Barton, 2004, p. 3). Barton discusses Higgins' concerns 'for the survival of indigenous cultural traditions in the face of the global mass marketing of the image' (Barton, 2004, p.3). Her examination of how to represent traditional notions in a modern Ireland struck a chord with me, as I was figuring out myself how to represent traditional ways of life in a rural Gaeltacht (Irish speaking) community in the 21st century, without evoking an idealistic image of this area.

'In the Irish case, the absence of a local film production industry for most of the twentieth century means that if we are to talk of a national cinema, or a national film text even, we have to engage in a series of acts of creative bricolage; that is, to see how the image of Ireland on screen emerged out of the national industries of other countries, especially in the British and Hollywood industries....' (Barton, 2004, p. 4).

During my research, topics that have arisen often are ideas surrounding heritage films and the Hollywood gaze. That the image of Ireland and Irishness is thoroughly entrenched within these fields is obvious.

Earlier in this chapter I described key fictional films and early documentaries that often provoked controversy in their use of idealised or clichéd images of rural Ireland in cinema. I investigated these films in the hope of pin-pointing what has been neglected in their narratives, to enrich my understanding of where I might subvert this popular notion of Irishness in my own practice.

‘During the 1950’s Irish documentary emerged with films like *Mise Eire* (1959), which took the Irish press by storm. ‘Describing the events of *Mise Eire* as ‘the birth of a nation’, this film would provide a template for the new cinematic nation as well as eulogising the construction of the current civil entity’ (Barton, 2004, p. 70).

*Mise Éire* was the highest point of the heroic-nationalist phase of documentary filmmaking and the movement continued to attract practitioners concerned with the construction of an indigenous cinematic view of Ireland. Patrick Carey created some of the most distinctive of these; his films such as *Yeats’ Country* (1965) or *Errigal* (1970), both nominated for Academy Awards, saw an Ireland untouched by modernism, and infused with a sense of natural beauty. Although his work was appropriated by the tourist industry, Carey’s aesthetic was still far removed from the rural idyll seen in so many tourist films, indebted to the film work of John Ford, most especially in his fictional film *The Quiet Man* (1952). This, Ford’s best-known film, has come to dominate cinematic depictions of Ireland. Certainly as Barton describes it:

‘its Technicolor vision of a land of rosy cheeked colleens, leprechaun-like locals and humane clergy united by song, drink and public brawling had little in common with the Ireland of the 1920s in which it was ostensibly set’ (Barton, 1997, p. 72).

An Irish critic of the time had the following view of the film...

‘Maybe Ford found a leprechaun sitting on the back of his director’s chair when he went to work with John Wayne and Maureen O’Hara in County Galway, and maybe it was the leprechaun that, with impish humour, blew all his thoughts of serious film-making out over Galway Bay’ (*The Irish Independent*, 9 June 1952).

Particularly pertinent to my own investigation of the image of Irishness in the moving image, was the approach Kevin Rockett took in his book *Cinema and Ireland* (1988), this volume was important in my early research as it addressed why, by comparison with other national cinemas, cinema in Ireland is relatively unexplored. It also acts as the first major detailed analysis of key representations of the Irish on screen. The book centres around the belief that:

‘Through its recurrent concern with landscape, violence, the past, community and sexuality, cinema is perhaps the best placed of all cultural forms to investigate critically what ‘Irishness’ means in the popular imagination’ (Rockett, 1988, p.xiv).

Part of what emerges in Rockett’s book is that the establishment of an indigenous Irish film industry must always amount to more than simply the provision of a studio. ‘For what is also of crucial importance is the types of films which an Irish film industry produces, what issues they attend to, what formal approaches they adopt and what kind of cultural intervention they contribute’ (Rockett, 1988, p.xiv). My own work is an attempt to make an intervention into this popular image of the Irish on screen, and Rockett’s centralising of cinema, as the best way to investigate these stereotyped images was beneficial to my argument. One of the ambitions of this text *Cinema and Ireland* is to demonstrate the disabling effects of the dominant screen images of the Irish and thereby establish the importance of an Irish cinema ‘which is concerned to render these problematic’ (Rockett, 1988, p.xiv). Therefore, much of the book looks backward, but does so in order to look forward.

Andrew Higgins Wyndham in his book *Re-Imagining Ireland* (2006) deals with contemporary filmmaking in Ireland, which helped broaden the field of my own research. The book tackles important issues, such as the notion of the rural being inherently linked with the landscape.

An article in the book by Martin Mc Loone discusses the work of Neil Jordon and his film *The Butcher Boy* (1997), an adaptation of Pat McCabe’s highly regarded 1992 novel. Like the book, the film is a complex and unsettling examination of the Irish psyche, filtered through imagination and fantasies. A disturbed 12-year-old boy, Francie Brady, is the first-

person narrator of the film. The film visualises the boy's fantasies in surreal terms, 'considerably reconfiguring the visual landscape of cinematic Ireland in the process' (Higgins, 2006, p. 145). An hallucination scene is set against a panoramic view of Ireland's natural beauty. The sequence in the film was shot in Glendalough, one of Ireland's most famous beauty spots and an important destination on the tourist trail. It is a familiar image, in other words, of a romanticised and stylised rural Ireland, a picture postcard of Ireland, a kind that dominated cinematic representations of Ireland for decades.

'Suddenly there is a nuclear explosion literally shattering audience expectations of rural Ireland. The film is a complex exploration of a changing society in which old certainties of religion and family are blown away and anxiety and doubt replace them. The explosion and the abused child become metaphors for Ireland itself, traumatised by its colonial past and its religious/nationalist present and considerably shaken up by the cataclysmic influences of contemporary culture....' (Mc Loone, p. 145).

Most of the Irish imagery that dominated the representation of Ireland, and the Irish, in the 20th century was established in Ireland during the extraordinary period of cultural ferment conducted by the revivalists that lasted from the 1890s to the early 1920s. This era of Irish cultural nationalism encompassed a remarkable revival in Irish literature and theatre, providing underpinnings for Ireland's Nationalist aspirations. In the conservative and traditional culture of the time, it is not surprising that cinema, the art form of the 20th century and modernity, was slow to grow

'Both in their different ways reflected Ireland out of step with the modern world, either as an underdeveloped rural utopia or a fractious political backwater caught up in the grip of an increasingly irrelevant obsession...' (McLoone p. 147).

My exploration of the romanticised image of Ireland is informed by a critique of mythic tropes, where notions of otherness and familiarity are bound together in post-colonial societies. If something seems strange and unknown, it can be easier to assuage the situation by compartmentalising or boxing off that threat. This is achieved by laying down familiar traits on the unknown, to make it *known*, and therefore acceptable. The colonising society will generalise with a stereotype, rather than thinking of the society in terms of individuals with unique experiences.

There was an attempt made by Irish writers particularly during the Irish Literary Revival, as part of the Irish Renaissance (which lasted from approximately 1880 until 1930) to dismantle prescribed notions of the Irish people. The writers of this period had an ambition to re-define the perception of the Irish people, to give them a new voice away from the fabled notions of the drunken fighting Irishman. W.B. Yeats stated in the early days of the Literary Revival that: 'If we can but take that history and those legends and turn them into drama, poems and stories *full of the living soul of the present* ...we may deliver that new great utterance for which the world is waiting' (Yeats, 1892, p.187).

A need for a re-visioning of how Ireland was perceived, beyond a limiting or received idea of the Irish people was needed. The Irish literary revival however was associated with a revival of interest in Ireland's Gaelic heritage and the growth of Irish nationalism. This association with the Gaelic league is problematic. Problems arose when Ireland's visual culture (post revival), and its cultural historical past, became intermingled and impossible to separate, and nationalist ideals took hold. Because of Ireland's long history as a colony and the long-term effects of that history, the Irish struggle for independence became a major component of Irish identity; the notion of the fighting Irish is hard to shift. Historically Ireland's culture was suppressed, so that when it got the chance to represent itself, as happened during the Literary Revival, it did so with great fervour. Gibbons reiterates this when discussing the foundational images within Irish visual culture, 'from its beginnings in the early decades of the present century, Irish cinema has been dominated by a number of pervasive and interconnected themes: the idealisation of the landscape, the persistence of the past, the lure of violence and its ominous association with female sexuality and the primacy of family and community...' (Gibbons, 1997, p.117).

I must therefore within this thesis problematise the romanticisation of images of Ireland, whereby a new kind of national identity was sought in the stories and myths of ancient Gaelic Ireland. I will now examine a number of case studies that tackle this issue head on. [I must note here that any discussion of the national revival of interest in the Irish language and Irish Gaelic culture (including folklore, sports, music, arts, etc.) is rather a different thing to how I see the plight of the indigenous community of Inishbofin].

Gibbons' linking of violence and ominous sexuality derives from a recurrent theme in earlier Irish films. He accords Sidney Olcott's *Rory O'Moore* (1911) as an example of where many of these motifs are played out. The hero of the film has a violent near-death experience but is ultimately saved from the gallows when female devotion for the hero wins over adversity. His mother and lover, with the help of the local priest, rescue him. (Catholicism is also a big part of the Irish national identity, which is why the priest makes an appearance in the film.)

The power of the female in Irish tales and culture is not to be underestimated. If you were driving along Ireland's roads for any length of time, you would not have to wait long before coming across a grotto of the Virgin Mary by the side of the road. In relation to images within the contemporary documentary footage of Inishbofin, one of the first things to greet you if you were to step off a boat on the island would be a life-sized grotto dedicated to the Virgin Mary. All the fishing boats setting off from Inishbofin will carry, somewhere on board, a small plastic statue of the Virgin Mary filled with holy water, which the fishermen carry for safe passage on the sea. My practice portrays a rural peripheral community on the outskirts of Ireland. However the role of the work is not to simply deny the traditional, or reject as false these perceived stereotypical images seen in my film work from Inishbofin (an old man reciting a Gaelic song or a lone fisherman rowing out to sea) but instead, I argue that the role of the practice is rather to question these tropes of traditional stereotypes, of landscape, history and Irish identity, from within.

Clearly, this image of the Virgin Mary is a powerful force in Irish culture. The difficulty with these powerful motifs is evident in the many early films associated with Irish cinema. Films such as *Man of Aran* (1934), *The Quiet Man* (1952), *The Gentle Gunman* (1952), *The Rising of the Moon* (1957) and *Ryan's Daughter* (1970), which, Gibbons explains 'return to these considerations of landscape, of past, violence and sexuality, (perhaps) varying from one another in emphasis and approach, rather than in a fundamental change of subject matter' (Gibbons, 1996, p. 117). This trope of clichéd images has had a detrimental impact on the representation of Ireland and how it is perceived internationally. These stereotyped creations have cast a far reaching shadow over Irish cinema, to such an extent that, as Gibbons notes, 'any new departure in cinema which addresses itself to one

of these themes, even in a sustained critical manner, runs the risk of being appropriated back into the very tradition which it is opposing' (Gibbons, 1996, p. 117).

My own practice is intrinsically enmeshed with images of the pastoral Irish landscape, and invariably with the past (the good old days), so that a sustained critical investigation of these clichéd images is required. How do I make a distinction between my own work and the canon of fabled imagery that has reinforced mocking, or over sentimentalised views of Ireland for so long?

This thesis tackles this problem by disrupting the dominant linear narrative of history, to enable a reconsideration of Irish identity and how it is mediated and perceived. This argument is worked into the structure of my practice by the manner in which the minor voice of the rural community of Inishbofin, on the periphery of society, is brought to the fore. In the space of the practice, the people of Inishbofin and their unique personal experiences, intervene in, and begin to fragment, the larger conventional or *known* historicity, establishing instead a new sense of Irish identity with its own images.

Gibbons considers Pat Murphy's film *Maeve* (1981) as an example of identifying ways in which to subvert these clichéd images to 'confront the whole romantic tradition head-on' (Gibbons, 1996, p. 117). The film *Maeve* provides a focal point for my analysis of landscape, and in the process I identify continuities with my own practice, which centres on the exploration of a cultural landscape and how it is mediated. *Maeve* uses landscape as a tool with which to explore notions of identity and nationalism. The film seeks to divest the past of stagnant forms of romanticised and mythical notions of nationalism by reinstating women and the discourse of feminism into the agenda of Irish history. The film breaks down and disrupts the dominant male authorial narrative, offsetting it against a renewed investment in women in the portrayal of history. This, in turn, facilitates a new sense of Irish identity.

In the film a young woman, Maeve Sweeney, returns from London to Belfast, and to the Republican enclave where her father Martin, her mother Eileen, and younger sister Roisin continue to live. In coming back to her community Maeve feels alienated, first from the menacing British military presence on the streets of Belfast and, secondly, from the



romanticised nationalistic atmosphere within her own community, which centres around a traditional, male-dominated Republicanism. The film outlines Maeve's attempts to come to terms with her own upbringing in this small community and follows the different ways in which her identity, as a young woman in Ireland, is intertwined with forces of *time and place*, and by social constraints of culture, gender and politics.

The film charts, not just a political debate concentrating on the Northern Irish 'Troubles', but rather a wider set of questions drawing on the foundational images of Ireland, and their role in the development of cultural nationalism and Irish identity. The intertwining of myth, history and reality is a condition of Irish culture that is still hard to disentangle.

Many flashback sequences in the film *Maeve* involve scenes from the protagonist's childhood when she is travelling in her father's van through the Irish countryside. The landscape seen on screen is dotted with ancient ruins, which continually reflect the notion of a continuous recurring past to the viewer. It is of interest, notes Gibbons, that it was precisely this prominent feature of the Irish landscape that was seized upon by the Irish author and historian Standish O'Grady (1846–1928) 'to confer permanence on the legacy of the heroic age' (O'Grady, 1881, p. 51).

O'Grady says:

'a sort of pre-historic narrative clings close to the soil, and to visible and tangible objects. It may be legend, but it is legend believed in as history, never consciously invented...and drawing its life from the soil like a natural growth'

(O'Grady, 1881p. 51)

It is, Gibbons comments:

'this romantic idea of stories in stones, of a naturalistic narrative denying its own construction and posing as an organic creation of history, which presides over the flashback sequence in *Maeve*' (Gibbons, 1996, p. 120).

For most of the film, the position of women is relegated to the periphery, as the dominant narrative of Maeve's father, Martin, in his recounting of historical events, is the dominant voice. But a shift in the view of landscape, and in the narrative, occurs half way through the film, when in one scene the camera shows Maeve's point of view, dislodging the

influence from the controlling male perspective that has so far dominated the film. The scene shows Maeve and her Republican boyfriend, Liam, having an argument about politics on Cave Hill, a promontory overlooking Belfast City. The camera begins to slowly pan across the site of the city below, showing Maeve's perspective, while her voice is heard off camera reciting words that come to her mind. This narration relates to the main subjects of the film, landscape, narrative and memory...

*'a centre, a landmark...a space for things to happen, a way in, a way out, a celebration, a guide, a release, a lie, a truth, a lie that tells the truth, a projection, a memory...'*

The non-naturalistic dialogue Murphy used disrupts the viewer's notion of reality, making them acutely aware of the presence of the camera, which helps to destabilise the dominant male linear perspective. The film is essentially a collection of loosely interlinked scenes, which refuse conventional narrative, in favour of deliberate and articulated disconnection, based on its central character's relationship with the world around her.

*Maeve* is an interesting film because of its use of this experimental narrative form to chronicle the feelings of alienation experienced by the female protagonist as she questions her place in a patriarchal nation. The disruption by the female protagonist of the male dominated narration is again witnessed in the penultimate sequence in the film. The scene takes place at the Giants Causeway, a site of unique rock formations and high cliffs on the coast of Northern Ireland. The cliffs of the causeway combine breathtaking landscapes, with myth and legend, and are the perfect setting to explore the main tropes of the film: landscape, memory, history and narrative.

In this scene, the dominant male voice of the father, Martin, is exposed as redundant when he is seen ranting at the sea about some political issue. In the meantime Maeve and her female counterparts ignore this tirade and share instead a renewed intimacy enabling them to experience a collective identity.

The mythical dimensions in Irish history, the 'masterful images', as Yeats phrased it, must, according to Gibbons, 'be attacked on their own terms as cultural and aesthetic forms, all the more when they are woven into the everyday fabric of life. For this reason local forms

of resistance centering on culture and women's issues...are in fact intrinsic to any attempt to free Republicanism from its image of a mystical communion with the past, and by doing so prevent it falling back on fictions when faced with a ...radical transformation of society' (Gibbons, 1996, p. 127).

The thematic parallels between my own practice and the film *Maeve* are seen in their search for the ability of a culture to transform itself from within. The consideration of a new sense of Irish identity, free from a limiting linear reading of history, highlights instead the intrinsic need to let the minor voice within the larger community of Ireland be heard.

## **6.7 The Avant-garde:** A critical engagement with specificities of cultural production and reception.

This section entails an analysis of the work of Irish Avant-garde filmmaker Vivienne Dick in relation to her attempts to mediate the relationship between the nation, the state and the female body.

Paul Willeman, the former editor of *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, writes in his essay, *An Avant Garde for the Eighties*, that the avant-garde is structured by a critical engagement with specificities of cultural production and reception. He pays particular attention in this essay to the avant-garde's representation of landscape. For Willeman, the new avant-garde may have the ability in their work to mobilise landscape 'as a layered set of discourses ... a text in its own right' (Willeman, 1984).

An analysis of the work of Irish avant-garde filmmaker, Vivienne Dick, further demonstrates how Irish landscape can be read, not a clichéd image whose romantic aura is bound up with Irish identity but rather as a text that can be read in itself.

Vivienne Dick was born in Co. Donegal in Ireland in 1950 but moved to the United States in the 1970s. In the U.S.A, Dick became actively involved with the *No Wave* film culture and went on to produce a series of Super 8 short films. When Dick began to make and exhibit her own work many of her films were staged around well-known New York sites, such as Coney Island, the Statue of Liberty, and the World Trade Center. The films featured diverse people she met through her life in New York, such as punk performers Lydia Lunch and Pat Place of the band Bush Tetras. In 1982, Dick decided to move back to Ireland and then in 1984 she left again, this time for London, where she became a member (and later director) of the London Film-makers' Co-op.

In 1981 Dick's work began to focus on overtly 'Irish' themes. The first piece of work I will look at is her film *Visibility: Moderate - A Tourist Film* (1981). This film explores her status as a 'migrant' filmmaker positioned between the U.S.A and Ireland.

She examines the mediated relationship between Ireland and the USA, focusing on advertising and tourism. It is probably Dick's most self-reflexive piece of work. The first part of the film depicts an American woman on a tour of Irish landmarks, portrayed by

Dick as a home movie. This 'tourist' is seen posing at ancient Irish ruins, visiting Puck Fair or kissing the Blarney stone. She is seen travelling on a horse-drawn cart, recalling images from both the romanticised John Hinde postcards of the Irish landscape and, in particular, the rose-tinted portrayal of landscape in John Ford's *The Quiet Man* (1952). The tour of the ruins is disrupted at several points in the film when we see the 'tourist' imagining herself as a 'Celt', running through a mystical rural landscape. Dick's film culminates in an interview with the former political prisoner Maureen Gibson and is, ultimately, 'concerned with the politics of representation, both in relation to the 'troubles' and the experience of women' (Connolly, 2004).

In his book, *Transformations in Irish Culture*, Luke Gibbons highlights a 'blurring of boundaries between the personal and the political', affiliated with the experience of colonisation (Gibbons, 1996, p. 21). [Gibbons quote is derived from the feminist slogan 'the personal is political']. The play between the public and private space seen in Dick's films could be read in a similar way; the filmmaker attempts to mediate the relationship between the nation, the state and the female body. Dick suggests that:

'Tourist land is always make-believe land in a certain way. You work most of the year and in America you get two weeks off, only two weeks. [...] You escape into this fantasyland, where everything has to be beautiful and fabulous. If it's Ireland you see lush green countryside and horses and carts and the Blarney Stone. [...] It's totally unreal; it's all memory and myth' (McDonald, 1982).

After arriving in London Dick received funding from the British Arts Council to complete another film *Rothach* (1985), a 16mm film, also based on the theme of Irishness. *Rothach*, which she filmed in Donegal, is the second of Dick's films I will discuss.

*Rothach* is also an exploration of a rural landscape. The 16mm film was shot in Donegal, where my own documentary work is also shot, and similarly explores the notion of narrative and the poetic. Dick depicts the difficult and barren landscape of the area, but she films it in a very picturesque manner. In the film, a child is seen playing the fiddle (a traditional instrument). The image is juxtaposed with images of a rural landscape, the bog and the traditional machinery associated with cutting turf on the bog. The mood of the film shifts with the introduction of a jolting electronic soundtrack and the eerie shot of the same

child - who we saw initially playing the fiddle - appearing in different locations, it becomes very apparent that this idealised landscape is in fact highly constructed. The film ends with the oral recitation of a poem, '*An Roithlean*', by Sean O Riordain. The theorist M. Connolly elaborates on this device by Dick:

‘Despite the relatively conventional nature of the images, this use of oral narration (particularly in the Irish language) seems to work against a ‘tourist’ perspective. In the process, the film seems to mobilise the landscape as a text to be read. So while *Visibility: Moderate* foregrounds the difficulty of finding a vocabulary adequate to the representation of the landscape, *Rothach* seems to privilege an historical relationship between image, language and landscape’ (Connolly, 2004).

Dick’s oeuvre is structured by a need to create a unique filmic vocabulary that addresses notions of Irish culture at the intersection of rural and metropolitan spaces, and encourages a reconsideration of Irish identity. The filmic work of *New Wave* cinema, Vivienne Dick and that of her Irish contemporaries -within the emergent Irish national cinema of the 70s and 80s (such as Bob Quinn and Thaddeus O Sullivan) - has overlaps in their shared oppositional (anti-colonial) practices. The practice of these artists and filmmakers creates a space to be opened up, in which alternative readings of traditional Irish identity can be negotiated.

## 6.8 How is the legacy of Colonialism accommodated within contemporary narratives of Irish identity?

This section develops the notion that within the construct of identity there doesn't exist only one meaning of said identity, or even many meanings that exist simultaneously, rather it is a constant and unending production of contested and contradictory meanings. This theory is explored in relation to the process of identifying the cultural differentiations of the people within my own documentary. One aim within the practice is that they too can be viewed in excess of the sum of their parts.

To consider Irish identity, and how it is constructed, I must revisit the colonisation of Ireland, which dominates the perception of Ireland.

Thomas McEvilley identifies the different stages of cultural formation informed by post-colonial theory in his essay *Here Comes Everybody* (1994). He identifies first the:

‘idyllic pre-colonial period, the subject of much subsequent nationalist nostalgia; second, the ordeal of conquest, of alienation, oppression and internal colonisation; third, the nationalist reversal ‘which not only denigrates the identity of the coloniser, but also redirects...attention to the recovery and reconstitution of a once scorned and perhaps abandoned identity, and forth, the stage ushered in by the generation born after the departure of the colonising forces, which is less concerned with opposition to colonial legacy...’(McEvilley, 1994, p. 13).

Through various forms of representation, be they cinematic representations, newspapers or racist jokes, the coloniser circulates the stereotype - the fighting Irishman, the drunken rogue - in order to enable their (the colonisers) position of power to remain stable. The stereotype fixes individuals or groups in one place, which denies them their own sense of identity, based on false or at least questionable knowledge. However this fixed knowledge coexists with *anxiety* and I argue that it is the role of my practice to make this disconnect apparent, to question assumed and fixed notions of Irish identity.

Bhabha's main contribution to the debate of the stereotype hinges on the notion of ambivalence and anxiety. Stereotypes exist to enable colonial authority to justify their rule due to superiority but on the other hand Bhabha suggests there also co-exists an anxiety

that troubles the site of colonial power. Here there exists both an expression of domination over the other but also evidence of anxiety about itself when he writes that ‘the fullness of the stereotype – its image as identity- is always threatened by lack’ (Bhabha, 1994, p.77). For Bhabha this ambivalence or anxiety becomes a space for resistance and a space in which to dispute the stereotype.

Homi K. Bhabha suggests that all forms of colonial identification need to be seen as:

‘modes of differentiation, realised as multiple, cross-cutting determinations, polymorphous and perverse, always demanding a specific calculation of their effects’ (Bhabha, 1994, p. 67).

According to Bhabha, each time we come across a stereotype it needs to be viewed afresh, as a singular instance, instead of as an assumed fixed identity. The construction of identity doesn’t only have one meaning, or even many meanings that exist simultaneously, but rather it is a constant and unending production of contested and contradictory meanings. Bhabha suggests:

‘It is in the emergence of the interstices—the overlap and displacement of domains of difference—that the intersubjective and collective experiences of *nationness*, community interest or cultural value are negotiated. How are subjects formed ‘*in-between*’, or in excess of, the sum of the ‘parts’ of difference (usually intoned as race/class/gender, etc.)’ (Bhabha, 1994, p. 2).

In the process of identifying the cultural differentiations of the people within my own documentary, my aim is that they too can be viewed in excess of the sum of their ‘parts’ (as Bhabha suggests). A close analysis of their cultural uniqueness is intrinsic in my attempt to destabilise the stereotype, the known, or fixed identity. My practice creates a space in which to jointly screen the archival and contemporary documentary images, an *in-between* space, (in-between a fixed and limiting idea of Irish identity), in which I can momentarily dislodge the notion of the stereotype and let both the archival and contemporary footage be seen afresh.

A quote from Edward Said’s book *Orientalism* (1978) illustrates what can happen if the stereotype is not questioned anew:



‘Something patently foreign and distant acquires, for one reason or another, a status *more* rather than less *familiar*... a new medium category emerges, a category that allows one to see new things, things seen for the first time, as versions of a previously known thing. In essence such a category is not so much a way of receiving new information as it is a method of controlling what seems to be a threat to some established view of things....’ (Said, 1978, p. 72).

Said posits the notion of the repeatability of images to compound stereotypes: if images are repeated they become known and assumed, and the threat or fear of the foreign is removed. Bhabha believes that there are ‘boundaries of colonial discourse’ which ‘enables a transgression of these limits from the space of the otherness’ (Bhabha, 1994, p. 67). The space of the Other transforms the problem of the stereotype for Bhabha and this is the main point of interest for me in his writings:

‘The stereotype is not a simplification because it is a false representation of a given reality. It is a simplification because it is an arrested, fixated form of representation that, in denying the play of difference (which the negation through the Other permits), constitutes a problem for the *representation* of the subject in significations of psychic and social relations’. (Bhabha, 1994, p.75).

The identity of any race or any people is an ever-changing production of contradictory meanings.

## 6.9 Images of Ireland: the right to narrate from the periphery

In this section the mythic trope of images that make up how Ireland is perceived on screen is critiqued. Images from my own and others documentaries including John Hinde's romanticised postcards of Ireland are extrapolated upon in relation to the concept of nostalgia within the works.

The role of performance in non-fiction film is also analysed. The performative documentaries discussed are simply an articulation by filmmakers designed to accentuate, rather than hide, the means of producing the work. The work of filmmaker Robert Flaherty is discussed in relation to the incorporation of performance in documentaries.

In order to accomplish this transgression or transformation of the representation of Ireland from within I need to critique the mythic trope that surrounds images of Ireland. Already the very concept of homogenous traditional or organic communities is in a profound process of redefinition and my own practice seeks to accommodate disparate legacies within the narratives of Irish identity.

The Irish director Muiris Mac Conghail, in his documentary on the Blasket Islands, *Oileán Eile* (1985), creates a succession of images that recall the past, both in black and white photographs, and archival footage. In the documentary the landscape we are watching unfold on screen through black and white imagery suddenly becomes illuminated in colour. For a moment, Gibbons says 'we assume that we are back at reality, and that the camera has caught up with the present. But as the images unfold the bedraggled cloths and the unkempt thatched cottages bring home to us that this is still archival footage, perhaps some of the earliest colour films of Ireland. The strangeness comes from viewing the myth itself in colour' (Gibbons, 1996, p. 37). This technique of juxtaposing the black and white archival footage with other colour archival footage or with my own contemporary Super 8 footage is one that I intend to utilise within my own practice. The use of the Super 8 to shoot contemporary scenes, will momentarily trick the spectator and they will be forced to reconsider the truth of what period of time is seen on screen, contemporary or archive.

We tend to associate colour and crisp film stock with realism, on the assumption that it shows us reality, the truth. Within my own practice, this technique of mixing colour with

B&W images and different film stock, DV or Super 8, is a technique I experiment with during the editing process. In one of my filmic experiments, I play with B&W in a series of stills I took during one interview with an Inishbofin islander, Michael McFadden. In this sequence, Michael is shown slowly turning over a small corn fáinne (ring) in his hand.



Fig 1. Still from my documentary practice: Micheal holding the corn fáinne.

The fáinne is an important symbol for the islanders, because they believe it will bring them a fruitful harvest. In the shot, Michael begins to open a small crumpled leather purse, where it is revealed he has stowed a bounty of these small corn fáinnes, some for over sixty years. It is a simple, but important, sequence within the documentary. It illuminates the fragility of the islander's existence, seen physically in the gentle caressing of the corn fáinne in the coarse hands of the island fisherman, who has spent his life at sea pulling nets, marking his hands irrevocably. This sequence is embedded in the motion colour footage of the contemporary documentary work. My aim, cinematically, is to keep the spectator of the work actively questioning the age of the footage. The technique of 'past-present' - a constantly criss-crossing montage of temporalities- enables the footage to be dislodged from any fixed dominant position or time frame.

When exploring the canon of stereotypical imagery that has come to dominate how Ireland is perceived internationally, the work of John Hinde (who published his first postcards of the Irish landscape in 1957) comes to the fore. Gibbons notes in relation to Hinde's work that, 'to criticise these idealised images for ignoring the 'real' Ireland, for masking over the

squalid social realities of the time, is to miss the point of the genre; it is like taking the *Wizard of Oz* to task for failing to make a slice-of-life documentary about Kansas in the depression' (Gibbons, 1996, p. 38).

Gibbons identifies nostalgia as suffusing these postcard images. This, he explains 'is not simply the evocation of an idealised past, but a very distinctive form of longing: 'nostos', to return home, 'algos', a painful condition - the painful desire to restore the sense of belonging that is associated with childhood, and the emotional resonance of the maternal' (Gibbons, 1996, p. 39).



Fig 2. John Hinde Postcard.

When colour photographs first appeared in Irish family albums, they were usually the images left behind by returned emigrants, and were thus more evocative of memory. In John Hinde's Irish postcards, there is an uneasy feeling that we might be getting a last glimpse of a world that we have already lost. It is as if, theorises Gibbons, 'the emigrant's break with the past has been internalised *within* Irish culture, forming its popular image of itself.' (Gibbons, 1996, p. 40).

Hinde hoped to capture the vividness of the Irish countryside, as well as the imagination of his audience. He came up with a method that blended Irish stereotypes (donkeys, red-headed children) with the lush, seemingly endless landscapes. He would sometimes enhance colours in his studio to get a desired effect. He was well known for setting up, or

changing, a scene so that it would fit his strict style. If he found something unpleasant, or out of place, in his pictures, he could simply cover it up or move it out of the way to get the best shot in which to frame his imaginary vista. It was said that Hinde carried a saw in his car, which would be brought out and used to cut a nearby bush if necessary, to hide any unsightly or modern artefacts in his postcard shot. In considering these postcards, Gibbons suggests that:

‘The image operates almost as a flashback on another possible world, as if expressing the spectator’s aspiration; ‘Wish I was there’. The attempt to recover the innocence of the receding past is crystallised in the archetypal image of the thatched cottage, from which a mother emerges to welcome her two children approaching with donkeys and creels. The prodigal colour and total artifice of these narratives suggest that there is no real prospect of returning home’ (Gibbons, 1996, p. 40).

The problem with the issue of nostalgia being interwoven in the postcards’ subject matter, and in their aesthetic, is that they attempt to fix the past and conserve a mythical, constructed view of Ireland, creating a sense of longing for a past that no longer exists.

Stella Bruzzi in her book *New Documentary* (2000) discusses the role of performance within the non-fiction film or, what she terms, performative documentary. The performative role of the subjects of my own documentary practice in producing new forms of Irish identity will be explored in the chapter ‘The Double Time of the nation’. Here, a constant revision of the concept of national in performative works creates a space for ‘writing the nation’ anew. In this thesis the performative possibilities within documentary are considered, but for now, I want to elaborate on the idea that non-fiction film can never really represent the real. Bruzzi suggests documentary is a ‘dialectical conjunction of a real space and the filmmakers that invade it’ (Bruzzi, 2000, p. 153). For Bruzzi, the new performative documentaries are simply an articulation by filmmakers designed to accentuate, rather than hide, the means of producing the work. They are concerned with representing reality, but at the same time are more aware of the ‘falsification and subjectification’ any representation of reality entails (Bruzzi, 2000, p. 187).

‘Performance has always been at the heart of documentary filmmaking and yet it has been treated with suspicion because it carries connotations of falsification and fictionalisation, traits that traditionally destabilise non-fiction pursuit.’ (Bruzzi, 2000, p. 153).

These negative connotations surrounding notions of performance in non-fiction film can be traced back to the late 1950s, early 1960s and the origins of Observational Cinema, which evolved from Direct Cinema. Claims of truthfulness, authenticity and veracity by the prominent filmmakers of this movement have come to be challenged because of their refusal to acknowledge the role their own intrusion, and the role performance played in their films. But the incorporation of performance in documentaries can be traced back even earlier, to the father of dramatic manipulation and distortion, Robert Flaherty.

Flaherty is known for portraying staged events as reality and for distorting the reality of his subjects in his most famous films, *Nanook of the North* (1922), *Moana* (1926) *Man of Aran* (1934), and *Louisiana Story* (1948). Brian Winston, film scholar and Professor at Lincoln University, academic and author of *Claiming the Real: The Documentary Film Revisited* (1995) (along with many other books on the subject of documentary) has recently written and been the executive producer on a new documentary *A Boatload of Wild Irishmen* (2009). The film investigates Flaherty’s legacy and explores his life and works through a number of interviews with participants from Flaherty’s films and through the use of archival footage and excerpts from actual Flaherty films. Winston notes that:

‘Flaherty was the first to work out how to transform film of real people going about their everyday lives from mere shapeless surveillance-camera observation into a dramatic, enthralling narrative and that, in essence, is what documentary is. This was a brilliant breakthrough, but it can cause real moral dilemmas’

(Winston, 2010,p.8).

One scene in particular in the documentary demonstrates the creative narrative and questions the authenticity of Flaherty’s working methods. The viewer of the original film, *Nanook of the North*, sees Nanook harpooning a walrus on the beach, but highlighted for the viewer of *A Boatload of Wild Irishmen*, is a rifle lying illuminated on the beach. The rifle had inadvertently been captured in Flaherty’s shot, after he had encouraged the Inuit to hunt in the fashion of their recent ancestors even though they were now using guns in

their hunting. Winston adds:

‘At an academic conference some years ago, my Canadian colleague Seth Feldman pointed out to me the rifle on the beach when Nanook has supposedly harpooned the walrus’ (Winston, 2010, p.9).

The performative element within documentary making is seen to undermine the pursuit of representing the real. But an alternative does exist for performative documentary filmmakers, whereby the construction and methods employed in structuring the documentary are exposed. Instead, suggests Bruzzi, documentarists can ‘elect to present an alternative ‘honesty’ that does not seek to mask their inherent instability, but rather to acknowledge that performance - the enactment of documentary, specifically for the cameras - will always be at the heart of non-fiction film (Bruzzi, 2000, p. 187).

The technique described by Bruzzi, of not hiding the working mechanisms of documentary, is a working method I employ in my own practice, the camera or sound boom are often glimpsed in shot.

This leads me on to another issue that arose during my research, how to tackle the issue of nostalgia within the work. Nostalgia attempts to fix a mythical past therefore what is needed and sought within my own practice is both a reference to the traditions embalmed within the community that I am documenting, but also an active reappraisal and renegotiation of this past to inform the spectator of what the future identity of the people of Inishbofin might hold. I will now give two examples of my own documentary working methods where I attempt to portray the notion of a past that informs the future.

A sequence in my contemporary material from Inishbofin sees a fisherman on the island sitting and having a conversation with his young son. The son has just returned triumphantly from catching a single fish and is proudly displaying it for his father’s approval. A light-hearted scene follows in which the father questions his son about the fish - where it was caught, what is it called – all the while turning the still live flailing fish in his hands. The core of the documentary can all be read from this simple sequence: a sense of place and the sustainability of this remote community and its Gaelic language.



Fig 3. Still from *Return to the Sea*.

The past and future of the community of Inishbofin are implied within this sequence: the continuity or perhaps discontinuity of the fishing way of life for the new generation of islanders is insinuated. The past, present and future of the community are all held within this brief moment in the work. The past of the father's livelihood (and traditions) is seen in the ease with which he handles the fish, the present sees the father strive to pass on his knowledge to his own son, and the fragile future of this community is embodied in the young boy.

Another sequence in the contemporary Inishbofin material depicts an older man sitting on a chair outside his home, singing a song to camera in Gaelic. It is a haunting scene with a glimpse of a world that may have already lost its oral traditions and way of life. But I employ the use of the extended shot for this scene so that when the song comes to its natural end the camera does not cut, but instead stays with the scene. The camera pans the scene and rests on a group of young women walking down the road. As they approach our singing subject, there is a brief exchange between them and the older man about the previous night's dance on the island. The exchange is in Gaelic and accords an alternative reading of the scene, that of a vibrant community still very much in touch with its oral traditions and with a strong sense of community spirit.





Fig 4. Still from *Return to the Sea*.

Bhabha argues that by ‘restaging the past it introduces other, incommensurable cultural temporalities into the invention of tradition’, which has the effect of disavowing access to an originary identity. For Bhabha, ‘the ‘right’ to signify from the periphery of authorised power and privilege does not depend on the persistence of tradition; it is resourced by the power of tradition to be reinscribed through the conditions of contingency and contradictoriness that attend upon the lives of those who are ‘in the minority’’ (Bhabha, 1994, p. 2).

In my own practice (where I have juxtaposed the contemporary footage of Inishbofin with archival Super 8 footage), the restaging of the past, whereby I insert contemporarily shot Super 8 footage, which introduces other temporalities into the ‘invention’ of tradition. In this way an intervention in any linear narrative of Irish identity is created. Here, at the site of the practice, different temporalities (archival and contemporary) are shown on screen. Different temporalities and different narratives occur according to multiple juxtapositions. The site of the practice becomes an *in-between* space where the minor-voice can be heard and where fixed notions of identity will be disrupted, and in its place a better understanding of the complex figures that make up the Irish identity can form.

## **6.10 Shock / Montage: Postmodernism in Irish visual culture**

In this section the concept of fragmentation within Irish society is explored and compared to cinematic attributes e.g. montage techniques. Transformations from within a society in respect of tradition are explored whereby the role of tradition is reconsidered in relation to its ability to activate voices from a marginalised community.

‘We are in the epoch of simultaneity; we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment’ (Foucault, 1967).

There is a constant intertwining of Ireland’s politicised past and its visual culture, so if we are to understand Ireland’s visual present and identity we must look once more to its past. Modern theorists believe that the many ‘shocks’ (war, colonisation, famine etc) that Ireland has encountered, and the inevitable forced mass emigration that followed from such a small country, lead to Ireland prematurely experiencing trends associated with a modern or postmodern society (e.g. fragmentation on which I will elaborate further on).

I will explore now what is meant by the ‘shocks’ experienced by Irish culture. From the colonial perspective the racial labels ‘white/non-white’ did not, suggests Gibbons, ‘follow strict epidermal schemas of visibility or skin colour so that, in an important sense, the Irish historically were classified as ‘non-white’, and treated accordingly’ (Gibbons, 1996, p. 175).

With the defeat of Catholic attempts to regain power and land in Ireland, the ‘Protestant Ascendancy’ (Ascendancy rule 1691–1778) sought to ensure dominance with the passing of a number of laws to restrict the religious, political and economic activities of Catholics and Dissenters. The Penal laws, passed for several decades after 1695, systematically discriminated against Catholics. They were excluded from education and from political life and were not allowed to practice their religion or speak their native tongue. In Edmund Burke’s words, they became ‘foreigners in their native land’ (Gibbons, 1996, p.176).

For the Irish people, there was no need to emigrate to experience the ‘multiple identities’ felt by the Diaspora. For the Irish, ‘the uncanny experience of being a stranger to oneself

was already a feature of life back home' (Gibbons, 1996, p.176). Mass emigration to America, resulting from harsh conditions back home, had contributed to the 'disintegration and fragmentation' of Irish society. As Gibbons notes, it had accentuated the premature 'shock of modernity' on Irish culture, even in its most remote, rural outposts. Gibbons understands that modernisation in any society cannot be solely accredited to external forces, but 'requires the active transformation of a culture from within, a capacity to engage critically with its own past' (Gibbons, 1996, p. 3). Of particular note for my own argument is his discussion on the capacity for 'transformation from within' in respect of *tradition*.

The community in which I shot my documentary is rich in tradition, but my belief is that tradition should not be automatically connected to notions of cultural inactivity, or stagnation, or be seen to have a disabling effect on a modern society. Gibbons argues, 'what linear models of social change (the media) overlook is that tradition itself may have a transformative impact, particularly if it activates muted voices from the historical past, or from marginalised sections of the community' (Gibbons, 1996, p. 4). It is this reappraisal of the role of tradition within the notion of modernity that I engage with in my work with Dr. Martin and his archive.

Bhabha raises a similar point in his consideration of societies on the periphery of the dominant centre when he suggests that:

'The borderline engagements ...may confound our definitions of tradition and modernity; realign the customary boundaries between the private and the public, high and low; and challenge normative expectations of development and progress' (Bhabha, 1994, p. 2).

I argue that, as a consequence of a thorough reinvestigation into the multiple narratives and symbolic forms within the rural community of Inishbofin in my documentary practice, national identity can no longer be read as a fixed entity. Instead, it must be understood in terms of specific cultural practices. Gibbons argues that the ability of home-produced films and T.V. programmes (programmes denoting Irish cultures) 'to question national stereotypes of landscape, history, women and nationalism, derives not from an outright rejection of their falsity, but rather involves a process of recasting them from within'. The

point is that ‘transformations induced by contact with the new may activate a transgressive potential already latent in the old, in the cast-offs and rejects of history’ (Gibbons, 1996, pp. 4–5). Dr. Martin’s archive footage, one of history’s ‘rejects’, has lain in an attic unseen by any public (outside of his immediate family) since he began his journey of recording his community in the late fifties and early sixties.

My argument is based on a rethinking of tradition, and traditions bearing on an understanding of contemporary Ireland, and of Irish identity. ‘It is because tradition is associated with order, stability and the inherited wisdom of the ages, the sluggish evolution of a society over a long duration, that it becomes the antithesis of the modern, against which both progress and enlightenment must define themselves’ (Gibbons, 1996, p. 5). In contradiction to the above theory, I intend for my practice to be a site in which not only the notion of the stereotype can be disrupted, as explored previously, but also where the apparently disabling effect of the past on modernity can be reconsidered.

As noted earlier, one of the consequences of the particulars of Irish society is that it did not have to await the 20th century to undergo the shock of modernity, because ‘disintegration’ and ‘fragmentation’ were already part of its history. In a crucial sense then, Irish culture experienced modernity before its time.

As far back as the 19th century Irish literature shows links between the political history of Ireland and its effects on Irish culture. The effects of the Great Famine and Irish rebellion caused, Gibbons notes, a ‘proto-modernist’ outlook in many of the authors of this time, within the ‘multiple’ narratives of Charles Maturin or the ‘montage effects’ of Boucicault’s melodramas. James Joyce, one of the great writers of the modernist movement in Ireland embraced this notion of multiple narratives that collectively create the montage that is Irish identity. Joyce suggests that:

‘Our civilisation is a vast fabric; in which the most diverse elements are mingled, in which Nordic aggressiveness and Roman law, the new bourgeois conventions and the remnant of a Syriac religion are reconciled. In such a fabric, it is useless to look for a thread that may have remained pure and virgin without having undergone the influence of a neighbouring thread’ (Joyce, 1959, p65).

In terms of film the Soviet Russian film director and theorist, Sergei Eisenstein, and more particularly the Ukrainian film editor Esther Shub, the pioneer of the 'compilation film', first developed the theory of montage as the systematic use of conflict within, and between, cinematic images. The 'montage of attraction', wrote Eisenstein, utilises:

'Every aggressive moment in it, i.e. every element of it that brings to light in the spectator those senses or that psychology that influence his experience—every element that can be verified and mathematically calculated to produce certain emotional *shocks* in a proper order with the totality' (Eisenstein, 1968, p. 181).

An argument has been posited among theorists involved in debates surrounding Irish culture, which characterises the past (tradition) as having a negative and 'disabling' effect on contemporary Irish culture. They argue that Irish culture should instead look to modernisation and the urban. The difficulty with this argument, notes Gibbons, 'is that the pastoral image of the countryside singled out for criticism - that of an organic community with an enclosed, continuous past - is itself an urban construct, having little or no connection with the actualities of life in what was far from an idyllic, agrarian order. Modernity, in this reading, can do little more than deny the past'. (Gibbons, 1996, p.169).

In Joyce's *Ulysses*, when Stephen Dedalus spoke of the 'nightmare of history', it was out of a conviction that the past was a destabilising rather than a conservative force. History was a source of both attraction and repulsion, 'the montage of attractions that is *Ulysses*' (Gibbons, 1996, p. 169). The internal and external shocks ravaged on Irish society could be seen in cinematic terms as a disjointed montage of its history. The fragmentation, which has long been part of Ireland's make-up, can be compared to the cinematic attributes connected with Joyce's writing, most especially in *Ulysses*. Joyce used montage with 'its incessant collision of images, simulating the disorientation and fragmentation of life in the metropolitan centre' (Gibbons, 1996, p. 165).

I have attempted to creatively appropriate similar montage techniques combining old and new, archival and contemporary, interwoven to such a degree that the trace of each will feed into the next. At the same time each juxtaposed image will retain the essence of its origins. It attempts to portray a constant portrayal of the *past and present* of the culture.

Here, multiple narratives from two pasts (archival and contemporary) criss-cross to portray the montage of different strands that make-up Irish identity. The juxtaposing of the images and timeframes within the site of the practice creates a feeling of disintegration and fragmentation. The different sequences of footage, which collide and recede in different temporal sections can influence the experience of the spectator and perhaps enable the work to produce the emotional ‘shock’ that Eisenstein advocated.

## 6.11 Documentary practice: Where does my practice sit within the discourse?

This section is a consideration of texts, which explore documentary within Ireland and the role non-fiction film plays in our understanding of Ireland.

An attempt is made within this section to situate my own work within the larger discourse of documentary practice in respect of compilation films and their directors.

‘The production of historical accounts is the discursive narrativization of events. Since the incursion of ‘theory’ into the discipline of history, and the uncomfortable advent of Michel Foucault, it is no longer too avant-garde to suspect or admit that ‘events’ are never not discursively constituted and that the language of historiography is always also language’ (Spivak, 1988, p. 333).

My debate in where to situate my work, and my own voice, within the larger discourse of documentary practice must consider what Foucault asks us to remember. That is, ‘what is reported or told is also *reported* or *told* and thus entails a positioning of the subject... that anyone dealing with a report or a tale (the material of historiography or literary pedagogy) can and must occupy a certain ‘I’ slot in these dealings’ (Spivak, 1988, p. 243).

Harvey O’Brien in his book, *The Real Ireland: The Evolution of Ireland in Documentary Film* (2004), gives an analysis of how documentary film developed in Ireland and how the image of Ireland itself developed alongside it, which was very helpful for the early stages of my project. It follows the evolution of the medium, from the ‘primitive’ pre-documentary period, to the present day. It also looks at how ideas of Ireland have been communicated through documentaries, both on the level of content, and in terms of underlying structures of production and reception.

O’Brien believes his purpose is to ‘open the debate on the role that non-fiction film played in our understanding of Ireland, to provide a perspective from the wings of the ‘discourse of sobriety’, to borrow Bill Nichols’s term, which define Irish society’ (O’Brien, 2004, p.xi).

‘The process of creating ‘documents’ is a ‘documentary’ one, as is that of compiling them. This English language usage is the first link between documentary film and what Bill Nichols terms the ‘discourses of sobriety’, by which he means systems of

knowledge and social organisation including science, economics, politics, education and religion which 'have instrumental power' in defining the nature of human social organisation. Though Nichols notes that documentary is not equal in influence to these 'discourses of sobriety', he says it has 'a kinship' with them. Documentaries sometimes not only have a bearing on general conceptions of the social and political world, but also are capable of direct intervention in social process...' (O'Brien, 2004, p. 9)

O'Brien discusses notions of place and landscape through the writings of Martin Heidegger and Brian Graham, which suggest that interpretations of the 'natural' environment (both urban and rural) depend on cultural and political factors often embodied in representational form. This fed into my own theoretical framework for discussing ideas of landscape when it came to my formal thesis. O'Brien points out how film, as a medium, 'offered unique opportunities for filmmakers and audiences to investigate the emergent nation, but how, for the most part, it was often squandered by intellectual and economic prohibitions characteristic of that time in Irish history' (O'Brien, 2004, p. 2). Beneficial to my own research has been his examination of developments in the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that raise issues of postmodernism, post-colonialism, and post-nationalism, pointing to the breakdown 'in social consensus which was echoed by an increasing sense of the breaking down of boundaries of the medium by radical filmmakers like Bob Quinn and John T. Davis' (O'Brien, 2004, p. 4).

The recently published book *Documentary in a Changing State* (2012) is pertinent to any discussion of the role of documentary within Ireland. The book is a collection of essays from manifold perspectives. The point of view of the documentary-maker, the academic and the policy-maker are considered in their exploration of the role of documentary in telling stories that confront the position of church and state within Ireland. It gives an analysis of the changes brought about within the political and social landscape of Ireland by many of the hard-hitting documentaries discussed within the book. If I am to consider Irish society and the shifts it has encountered socially, politically and culturally this book's exploration of these issues through the prism of documentary is relevant.



The author Erik Barnouw suggests in his book *Documentary: A history of non-fiction film* (1975) that, 'some documentaries claim to be objective - a term that seems to renounce an interpretative role. The claim may be strategic, but it is surely meaningless. The documentarist, like any communicator in any medium, makes endless choices. He (sic) selects topics, people, vistas, angles, lenses, juxtapositions, sounds, words. Each selection is an expression of his point of view, whether he is aware of it or not, whether he acknowledges it or not' (Barnouw, 1993, p. 287).

Another standpoint within the discourse is the Bazin vs Baudrillard argument, and their breaking down of any differentiation between image and reality - Bazin because he believed reality could be recorded; Baudrillard because he believes reality is just another image.

But it is Stella Bruzzi's intervention within the discourse of documentary practice that is of particular interest to my argument. This is because of her emphasis on the archive and her belief that the fundamental issue with documentary is 'the way in which we are invited to access the 'document' or 'record' through representation or interpretation, to the extent that a piece of archive material becomes a mutable rather than a fixed point of reference' (Bruzzi, 2000, p. 17). Within the film montages in my own practice, the archival footage of Dr. Martin juxtaposed with the contemporary footage, dislodges the archive documents from any fixed reading, from any fixed point in time, because of the way the time frames criss-cross unendingly in the work. This in turn makes it impossible for the spectator to attribute a fixed identity onto the characters seen on screen, rendering the identity of the people in the film as fluid.

I have noted the cinematic use of montage in James Joyce's work, where montage was used as a way of reconciling Ireland's fragmented past with its present. Now we can elaborate on the idea of montage, or compilation films, and their directors.

Bruzzi discusses the 'compilation film' work of Emile De Antonio, whose films play on the 'complexity of the relationship between historical referent and interpretation; they enact a fundamental doubt concerning the purity of their original source material and its ability to reveal a truth that is valid, lasting and cogent' (Bruzzi, 2000, p. 17). The

‘compilation film’, in Bruzzi’s opinion, is an alternative political approach to found footage.

Jay Leyda discusses the earliest form of compilation film in the work of the Soviet filmmaker Esther Shub:

‘(She)...brought back to life footage that had hitherto been regarded as having, at the most, only the nature of historical fragments. By the juxtaposition of these ‘bits of reality’ she was able to achieve effects of irony, absurdity, pathos and grandeur that few of the bits had intrinsically’ (Leyda, 1983, p. 224).

The events retraced in Shub’s film, *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* (1927), do not just ‘speak for themselves’. Shub’s intention is to use archive material extracted from its original context to offer a reinterpretation of events and to effect the ‘politicised activation of ‘suppressed’ ideas or the inversion of conventional meanings’ (Arthur, 1993, p.2). Shub does not see unnarrativised events, such as home movie footage, as decipherable until it has been placed in a fixed structure. Rather, as Bruzzi suggests, Shub believes that ‘there is a fruitful dialogue to be had between original newsreel, home movie footage and the like, and the critical eye of the filmmaker (and the implied new audience)’ (Bruzzi, 2000, p. 23). Walter Benjamin suggests that historical materialists should disassociate themselves from the victors of history and resist the maintaining of the status quo. Instead they should ‘brush history against the grain’ (Benjamin, 1955, p. 248). In my own documentary footage I endeavour to do this by reiterating the importance of the peripheral remote rural community of Inishbofin, by reclaiming their voices within the historicity of Ireland.

Documentaries are predicated upon a negotiation between polarities of objectivity and subjectivity. De Antonio’s work, and his didactic approach, is of interest to me because of his ethos of recycling archival material. This means that, as a documentarist, you must accept that the trace of the original film fragments are imbued within the new context:

‘De Antonio’s work clearly illustrates not only that original footage is open to interpretation and manipulation, but that general theses can be extrapolated from specific historical images *and that the historical event does not only reside in the past but is inevitably connected to the present*’ (Bruzzi, 2000, p. 30).

In this way the *Martin Archive*, and its juxtaposition alongside my own documentary footage, within a contemporary compilation, reiterates my argument that, to fully comprehend Irish identity and how it is constructed, we must renegotiate the past (the images of the past), if we are to fully understand the present. An historical and cultural re-visioning is required where the ‘past-present’ becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living.

**7. My Practice: A different way of encoding the archive:** the creation of a spatial-temporal experience of continuous transition and *in-betweenness*.

### **7.1 Framing the Archive: An analysis of the practice and its installation.**

My own moving-image practice is a temporal bricolage of filmic images, which act as a point of departure for a dialogue between archives from two different times. Time, in the practice, oscillates between the *Martin Archive*, from the 1950s, juxtaposed with my own archive, which documents the inhabitants of Inishbofin in Donegal, in the present day. The structural strategy of images on two different time scales results in a temporal space of in-between, where the minor voice may become heard in the gaps between then and now.

My documentary filmmaking practice as a research method: Although there are many conceptual layers present, the practice hinges on four critical concepts:

1. In order to disrupt a linear and continuous reading of history, multiple temporalities and stories are jumbled together to disrupt chronology. By utilising this structure within the film work, I formally invoke the multiplicities in the local community in a literal way—where past and present become indistinguishable.
2. A process of narration, and re-narration, is present when the re-emergent histories of a peripheral community create a plurality of voices and disrupt the pedagogic view of national identity. Instead, plural histories inflected by gender, race, class or ethnicity creates plural temporalities, exploding a dominant, colonial reading of history.
3. Within the practice, in the space of the in-between, a gap exists where an alternative can be read. In the editing of the practice, in the gaps and through the layering of times, a site is created where writing the nation anew becomes possible.
4. The aim of my practice is to bring forth the marginalised voice from the periphery of society and allow it a more prominent status in any reading of Irish identity. In the practice, the nuanced testimonies are crucial in any disruption of a perceived true, dominant reading of history and are productive in destabilising the false colonial foundation upon which they have been built.

The images I use create a spatial-temporal experience of flux, of continuous transition, and ‘in-betweenness’, that envelops the spectator. Through this working method, the practice takes on the form of a jumbled, reversed time frame, where multiple layers of time occur concurrently. In this way, chronology is disrupted, and the archive gains new possibilities.

The use of two different film archives reinforces the difficulties in expressing historical time, and alludes to the notion of a constructed archive and constructed histories.

In the practice the meaning-making becomes unstable and the films fragmentary nature means a complete meaning cannot be fixed. Here, the meaning-making gesture is one of disruption, the use of the two archives, old and contemporary creates a disrupted time frame.

The hybrid temporal bricolage of the *Martin Archive* and my Super 8 footage can be seen to afford alternative interpretations of the timeframe seen on screen. The images in the practice, displayed as they are in non-chronological order, enable this disrupted time frame to question the presumed accuracy of the past. This can, therefore, allow an alternative reading of the present (and a contingent reading of the future), to become visible in any reading of Irish identity.

The spectator is required to actively engage with, and experience, the history unfolding on screen if they are to attempt to decipher which time frame they are being shown. The juxtaposed images in the practice convey the continuity of these traditional events over time but also question constructed narratives and the ambiguity of historical images.

The replaying of the images illuminates the small differences, while their duplication and repetition enables something (else)—the minor voice—to become audible in the gaps or in-between. This re-assemblage produces new configurations, and interpretations, providing the spectator with a space for thought.

In the reframing of the *Martin Archive*, the trace of the past becomes animated by the disruption of linear, historical time. This is caused by the superimposition, in my practice, of the contemporary documentary images. The space of the installation (for the practice) is

a construct in space and time. The juxtaposing of the two archives has an effect on the spectator, who is caught in the intersection, in-between, enabling them to simultaneously feel like an insider / outsider.

The installation employs a bi-lingual position. The criss-crossing from the English language to the Gaelic language, throughout the work, simultaneously allows the spectator to experience the intimacy of connection—when it temporarily bridges the gap of here and there—and the feeling of separation, internalising a feeling of liminality.

The installation of my practice creates a space in which to jointly screen the archival and contemporary documentary images, in which I can momentarily dislodge the notion of the stereotype, and let both the archival and contemporary footage be seen afresh. Here, differences (different temporalities, different narratives) occur according to multiple juxtapositions that mark experience in a moment. It becomes an *in-between* space, where the minor-voice can be heard, and where fixed notions of identity will be disrupted. In their place, a better understanding of the complex figures that make up the Irish identity.

People within a nation are inventing and re-inventing that nation at every moment, changing its ideas of itself as well as its institutions. In this context where a review of the multiplicities within a nation is prioritised, the ability of a people to transform themselves from within can be evoked.

## 7.2 The Process of Distribution: For *Return To The Sea*.

The documentary *Return To The Sea* (2012) is a case study in the usefulness of film for a repressed community to express itself. It is also a case study in the usefulness of the film to support this tiny fragile community on the edge of Europe, giving a voice to the minority. The reception of the film publically and most especially how screenings designed to engage with a local audience (the community which it portrays) are received is particularly important for inclusion in the written component of this thesis. /

I use a three-pronged approach when considering the distribution of *Return To The Sea*.

- 1) Public screening for the community of Inishbofin.
- 2) Documentary film festival circuit
- 3) National broadcast on Television

As I am the director responsible for letting the voice of this marginalised community be heard anew I had to consider issues of authenticity and ethics, to ensure that the documentary was authentic to the voice I was trying to portray, that of the local community of Inishbofin.

In August 2012 I conducted a public screening of the documentary *Return To the Sea* within the local of Inishbofin, at the town hall in Magheroarty (a townland where the pier to Inishbofin is situated). The people of Inishbofin and the local community were invited to attend so that I could get a feel of how the film was received by the community involved. There was a great attendance as all were particularly interested in how they would look on screen and how the camera and myself portrayed both their community and the individuals who were interviewed within the documentary. There was a great energy in the crowd during the screening and the feedback afterwards was positive as the community felt they had been portrayed as they 'truly were'. They felt that they had been portrayed both sensitively and that there was a sense of empathy for the issues dealt with in the film. To summarise the feedback from the community the local parish priest Fr. Seán Ó Gallchóir (Fr. Sean Gallagher), who attended the screening and is the priest for Inishbofin island (he also features in the documentary *Return To The Sea*) wrote a letter after the screening stating how he felt the documentary dealt with the subject matter, that of giving a voice to the community. I have inserted the letter into the text on the following page.

Fón / Facs: 074 - 9135214  
nó 087 - 2237729

An t-Ath. Seán Ó Gallchoir  
Teach Pobail Chríost Rí,  
Gort A' Choirce,  
Leitir Ceanainn.  
Co. Dhún na nGall



Re: 'Return to the Sea'

14-6-2012

A Chara,

I had the great pleasure of viewing Genevieve McGill's film about Inis Bó Finne recently. I enjoyed it immensely and was enthralled by it.

I am the priest responsible for Inis Bó Finne and I knew all the people featured in the film. Genevieve chose her people very well. They represent the island truly.

What struck me most of all about the film was its utter genuineness. There was nothing of the 'posing-for-TV' phoniness that you sometimes find in such films in Genevieve's film. We saw the island people as they truly were. Everything was done with sensitivity and empathy.

I think Genevieve's film is an invaluable archive. I knew Mary Dhónaill and Mici Beag well and it was wonderful to see their faces and to see some of their rich lore preserved.

I found the whole film a haunting and beautiful piece of work and everything in it rung true. It seemed to me to be a true labour of love that did justice to Inis Bó Finne and its people,

Le gach grá  
Seán Ó Gallchoir



The second phase to ensure further distribution of the film work involves entering it to all relevant documentary film festivals where it can reach a wider target audience and can therefore aid in furthering and deepening the reach of the issues dealt with in *Return To The Sea*, namely that of giving voice. It is intended that by reaching a greater audience the film can act as a resource for future film-makers and researchers approaching this area (the general field of contemporary documentary studies, and the specifics of Irish documentary in particular) who will be able to draw upon it. I have included a screen grab of the current festivals that *Return To The Sea* is entered into on the following page.

# Filmmakers, Withoutabox.

## Screen at Festivals Submission Status

## Promote on IMDb Sell on DVD/VOD

## Submission Status

Viewing: [Current](#) | [History](#) for [Return to the Sea](#) -

You have **6** current submissions for this project.  
After a fest is over, the record moves into your status history.

### World of Women Film Festival

19 Annual from March 05, 2013 to March 08, 2013

Tracking ID: WOW-12-1149

Categories: Non-competitive - Features &  
Documentaries

Entry date: October 23, 2012

Notify date: 31-Dec-2012

Submission Protection: No

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### Marfa Film Festival

4 Annual from June 26, 2013 to June 30, 2013

Tracking ID: 13-0035-D

Categories: Documentary

Entry date: October 23, 2012

Notify date: 03-May-2013

Submission Protection: Yes

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### Berlin Independent Film Festival

5 Annual from February 08, 2013 to February 18, 2013

Tracking ID: BIFF13-699

Categories: Documentary Feature

Entry date: October 23, 2012

Notify date: 12-Jan-2013

Submission Protection: No

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[Submit &  
Upload &](#)**GLOBIANS DOC FEST BERLIN**

9 Annual from February 01, 2013 to February 03, 2013

**Tracking ID:** BLN-8856-F  
**Categories:** Feature Documentary  
**Entry date:** August 20, 2012  
**Notify date:** 30-Dec-2012  
**Submission Protection:** No

[View Confirmation Page](#)

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**Sundance Film Festival**

29 Annual from January 17, 2013 to January 27, 2013

**Tracking ID:** 6123-IDF  
**Categories:** International Documentary Feature Films  
**Entry date:** August 20, 2012  
**Notify date:** 03-Dec-2012  
**Submission Protection:** Yes

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**The Jameson Dublin International Film Festival**

11 Annual from February 16, 2013 to February 26, 2013

**Tracking ID:** JDIFF13124  
**Categories:** Documentary  
**Entry date:** June 28, 2012  
**Notify date:** 31-Dec-2012  
**Submission Protection:** Yes

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**Submiss**

The final phase of distribution will involve a national broadcast on the Gaelic speaking Irish television channel TG4. I am currently in negotiations with the commissioning editor of TG4 Proinsias Ni Ghraíne. The decision that has mutually been agreed upon is that the documentary *Return To The Sea (2012)* should enjoy a film festival life prior to broadcast, as once a documentary has been publically broadcast on television it is no longer eligible for screenings at film festivals. The intention is that *Return To The Sea once finished its run within the festival circuit will be screened as part of the channel's ANAMNOCHT* slot. (***Anamnocht*** (Soul revealing) Documentary series of hour-long treatments of personalities, movements, places and ideas that have shaped modern Ireland or that reveal a hidden or repressed aspect of our cultural, historical or social heritage). I have inserted the latest email correspondence between the commissioning editor and myself on the following page.



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**Documentary: Return to the Sea**

---

**Proinsias Ní Ghrainne** <proinsias.ni.ghrainne@tg4.ie>  
To: Genevieve Mc Gill <genevievemcgill@googlemail.com>

Mon, Jun 18, 2012 at 9:43 AM

Genevieve, a chara,

Apologies for the delay in getting back to you. I had given it to Micheál to view but he has been away for some time (his mum is very ill).

I fear that I may lose a lot of Donegal nuances.

I hope that TG4 will broadcast the film as part of the ANAMNOCHT slot on Wednesday nights at 9:30 but it's best to try and get a festival life for the film first and most festivals won't screen material that has already aired on TV.

I hope that it gets a good run at festivals, let me know and we can then speak to scheduling again about a possible slot.

Beir bua,

Proinsias

---

**From:** Genevieve Mc Gill [mailto:genevievemcgill@googlemail.com]

**Sent:** 15 June 2012 14:04

**To:** Proinsias Ní Ghrainne

**Subject:** Re: Documentary: Return to the Sea

[Quoted text hidden]

[Quoted text hidden]

Version: 2012.0.2180 / Virus Database: 2433/5076 - Release Date: 06/17/12

## 8. Conclusion

This thesis focused on revealing the possibilities of temporalisation in documentary and fiction film representation, which included thematic approaches to historical time and the film archive. The discussion was geared toward the space–time malleability of moving-images and the creative work of performative documentary filmmakers to utilise the formal and expressive potential of the medium that enables them to act upon representations of social and historical experience.

Aspects of truth and the documentary inducement to communicate and explore social problems were explored and questioned. The archive material (both the contemporary and *the Martin Archive*) and the creative dimension of framing and transforming space-time relations in moving images were experimented with at the site of the practice. Film was explored as a temporal art and as an art of the record.

The thesis sought to stress the creative potential of documentary to portray features of historical experience and shared memories. By expressing in my practice the dynamic transition between the present, the future and the past, experimental approaches to film and documentary may provide an alternative reading of history.

Finally, the space of the practice is a place for filmic experimentation on elements of time and memory, the creative process of constructing filmic narratives and the responsibility involved in representing the past. Documentary is a visual culture that has always had to answer questions about veracity and its depictions of a people or place, but it is also a creative medium where the possibilities of the moving image, as archive memory, can be further explored.

## **9. Appendix: The impoverished image: Transcript of interview I conducted with the academic Luke Gibbons**

Luke Gibbons is an academic whose research interests include Irish literature, film and post-colonialism. In my research I began seeing, again and again, the prominence of Irish literature over the moving image, and was directed towards approaching Gibbons because he had written in great depth on this subject. I conducted an interview with Gibbons at the Temple Bar Galleries in Dublin in 2006 and discussed this issue at length. I felt there was such a lack of indigenous moving image material coming out of Ireland historically and that this *gap* had to be addressed in my own research.

Ireland is better known for its way with words, and its proliferation of writers (Beckett, Joyce, Friel, Heaney), but Irish culture is also notable for the (relative) absence of a visual imagination. Why this predominance of word over image? This is the main topic discussed with Luke Gibbons in my interview. In it he examines the tensions between verbal and visual expression in Irish culture, from its basis in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. He raises questions of aesthetics of ‘the sublime’ in Edmund Burke’s writings, and cites the painter James Barry, and his attempts to approach the notion of narrativity. We also discussed the visual effects of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Irish romanticism in painting, fiction (e.g. Lady Morgan) and melodrama (e.g. Dion Boucicault), as well as a consideration of the modernist experiments of James Joyce.

Throughout the interview, Gibbons placed special emphasis on the competing claims of narrative and spectacle, time and space, on the Irish cultural landscape. Gibbons suggests that the dominance of ‘high’ culture - literature and theatre in Ireland - over ‘popular’ culture, like Film and T.V., exists because the popular culture of films is seen to be responsible for the, often damaging, popular image of the Irish. Gibbons tends towards a non-exclusivist (an open-ended or fluid) form of identity, which allows a critical engagement with both past and present, with the hope of opening up new possibilities for the future.

This interview was a crucial point of departure in my research. Gibbons introduced the idea of narrativity in the Irish psyche and how this affects the moving image in Ireland.

Temple Bar Gallery & Studios Dublin 2006

Interviewer:

It's just very relaxed. It's just anything you want to say on the idea of the local and the parochial or on the idea of looking at Irish art.

Gibbons:

Well I might look at or just say something about the word/image problem or the perception that Ireland is weak visually but strong verbally. Would that be OK? And then bring it up to the present.

Interviewer:

Perfect

Gibbons:

One of the anomalies of Irish culture is that Ireland is almost over represented verbally on the literary world stage but that one is hard pressed to name an Irish artist who holds the same eminent position as Joyce or Beckett or Yeats or O'Casey and the list goes on and on. It's very difficult to account for why the image is so impoverished in Irish culture and why the word is so over represented. It brings up the whole question of the relationship between word and image in Irish culture and the irony is that some of the tensions between word and image go back to the beginnings of modern aesthetics. And that is in the 18th Century when Edmund Burke, in Trinity college and soon afterwards, wrote his treatise on the sublime and the beautiful. One of the aspects of that treatise that attracted a lot of attention at the time was its critique of the image and the suspicion of the image in relationship to the word. It was almost as if Burke launched a critique of the image at the very dawn of Irish art.

From the beginning there has always been a hermeneutic of suspicion about the image in Irish art and that's difficult to account for because Ireland is not a protestant culture with an interdiction of the image. It's a peasant culture and one would have thought that peasant cultures with a peasant background, with a rural background and a catholic background, with no kind of animus of the image would have been supportive of visual culture, but not so. Burke's critique is interesting in



that he attacks the image for being too graphic and spelling out too much detail, leaving nothing to the imagination. And part of his gesture towards the future is that the work of art is essentially unfinished for Burke. It almost ends on an ellipsis and the audience fill in the gaps and fill in what's incomplete. Audience participation is part of the work itself and Burke really did throw a long shadow over subsequent Irish art. The next turn art took in the wake of Burke was by his protégé, and the one figure, apart from Jack Yeats who historically held a strong standing in Irish art and that's the Cork painter James Barry.

It's kind of interesting that Barry was asked by George Washington to be the national painter of America. He was included in the 6 most eminent painters in Britain to decorate St. Paul's in the 1780s and he was president of the Royal Academy. He was a rebel and a republican and high maintenance, at least for the upper echelons of British society, and he got himself into trouble as much for his political views as his aesthetic views.

It's interesting that Barry had taken the full force of Burke's critique and almost tried to answer it through his art. The way Barry tried to answer it was to show that there was nothing words could do that images could not emulate and you begin to get this strand in Irish art.

Words are in a kind of tension with the image and the image is trying to do what words are best at and the two things that words were allegedly best at, according to Lessing in his *Laocoon* -which is the canonical work of modern aesthetics -was that words can attend to time based representations and words can also attend to narrative, while the image attends more to spectacle and tends more to the instant and spatial form. Barry almost tries to do visually what words do in terms of time and narrative, so you get this remarkable art that's straining at the seams in terms of narrativity. You have multiple narratives, you have cropping, you have fragmentation and he really is trying to do in visual form what ironically cinema picks up one hundred and twenty or one hundred and thirty years later. And so it could be argued why a painter like Barry, who kind of falls out of the pantheon of great painters, is really before his time rather than behind the posse in that sense.

And a lesser painter in the 19th century who was also part of it, but with less audacity, was Daniel Maclise. He probably is the greatest narrative Victorian painter. Again you see this ineluctable narrativity of the image that Irish painters try to bring into the image, structures of feeling and modes of representation that really belong elsewhere in theatre, fiction and in drama. They try to compress this into the image with the result that they kept making mistakes or kept doing work that was not really where the image seemed to be going in the 19th century. In the 19th century the image empties out narrativity more and more and narrativity becomes simply genre painting. Then the image begins to even attack time so when you come to Impressionism time has collapsed into a brief instant and is emptied out of the image. Irish painters tried to deal with time and kept trying to bring in narrativity and I suppose its in that sense that you begin to see precursors of cinema coming from within Irish culture. Interesting at that level is Boucicault, the playwright and dramatist, because many histories of cinema look to Boucicault's stage techniques and the rapid cutting he introduced on stage, almost as a proto cinematic form of stagecraft. What's striking about Boucicault is that he worked from the image. The Colleen Ban (1860), which became his most successful play, was based on eight engravings of Killarney that he found in a print shop in New York and apparently he had only to look at the images and said: I will have a play within two weeks. He sees the image and sees the narrativity of the image, and sees the narrative potential of the image and weaves his whole plot around the image. Indeed when the plays were advertised the scene shifts and the spectacle in that sense were the main attractions. The water cave at Killarney, the Macgillycuddy Reeks, the Gap of Dungloe, they were the main stars and the actors paled in comparison. It's striking that even though the images were still images, what Boucicault does is charge them with a kind of narrativity that is the precursor of early cinema and Boucicault is the vital figure in the emergence of early cinema.

So at this point then you come to Joyce and you almost get in Joyce the reverse of Barry, because what Barry was trying to do with images was what words were believed to be best, in Joyce you get the reverse. Joyce tries to do verbally what

images can do best and hence you get the so-called cinematic form of Joyce. Joyce describes scenes in visual detail including totally irrelevant information that would be caught in a photograph but would not necessarily be caught in a verbal picture. What Joyce tries to do is introduce all the peripheral detail of an image into verbal description with the result that narrativity begins to come apart at the seams because there is so much seemingly irrelevant material.

But what Joyce is really doing is trying to bring back into the image the hidden history of its verbal underground. In that way it could be argued that while it is true that Ireland has no great presence on the world stage in terms of painting, akin to the writers, in fact if you look closer then you begin to see from Barry, through 19th century legacies, you begin to see in stage design and set design and indeed in writers like Joyce, you begin to see that in fact Irish culture has been in a perennial struggle between word and image and even when the word comes out triumphant it's still doing the work of the image.

So I'm not sure if it really follows from the lack of representation on the world stage in Irish art that Irish culture is visually impoverished. It's not visually impoverished, it's simply that it kind of relates the eye to language and also to other faculties and other senses. The other thing that Burke was criticised for was not disengaging sight from smell, touch and sound. Burke was adamant that sight was not sovereign and that sight was not the primacy of vision. Burke tried to de-throne sight and relate it to the body, relate it to the rest of the sensorium. He brought criticism again upon himself for dethroning sight from its sovereign position. But it could be argued that in the last fifty years a lot of theories of perception and a lot of theories about art have been catching up with that to bring sight back down to earth and ground it in the body and in the moving body and the likes, so it could well be that it's only now that Irish visual culture is catching up with its potential in that way.

Interviewer:

Fantastic, thank you, great historical context. It's interesting when you bring in the stage and that whole side of things.

Gibbons:

It could be argued that one of the defining features of Irish art is the porousness between high culture and popular culture. While dominant strands in modern art were gravitating towards what Michael Fried calls absorption, in other words the artwork was receding into itself and kind of disavowing the spectator, it was always bound up with the need for a popular audience and for addressing a spectator. The most famous example of this is Jack Yeats who covered the whole spectrum from cartoons and comics and popular illustration to some of the most challenging expressionistic art in the Irish tradition and at a European level. One of the constant concerns is the address to the spectator in Irish art as if theatricality was the dominant aesthetic in Irish culture and not just the literary, which is the common perception.

But it could be argued that performativity, which is time based and which is body based and theatrical, in the sense that it takes a spectator, it could be argued that that is actually what the image has been trying to appropriate in recent Irish art. It's striking that a lot of the most innovative Irish art in the last twenty, thirty years, has been time based and has taken on board the full complexity of what it is for an image to have a spectator, for an image to have a mode of address. I suppose James Coleman would be the presiding figure over that development, at a global level indeed and from the very beginning Coleman's work is haunted by the interval, by the gap, between two frames in a movie. By the movement that alludes the eye, a lot of his work is trying to see when does the image enter into narrativity and when does an image change, even if the content doesn't change. By putting a different verbal caption to an image, the image is changed and a lot of his work then takes on board the body and performativity itself, postmodern notions of allegory and spectatorship. If you look at work that's kind of public work like the work of Francis Hegarty and her dialogue with Joyce, when she takes Joyce's—the inner speech of Molly Bloom—and takes that out of a text and puts it all over Dublin buildings and makes it almost monumental, that kind of mock monumentality becomes a way of reclaiming the text and putting it back into the public space and circulating it at that level.

You could argue the same for work such as Ronnie Hughes and the remarkable time based performance he enacted on Streedagh Beach, where he made a kind of simulacra of the Spanish Armada cannon balls and got the community to fill them with their most precious objects and cast them to the winds on the waves almost to atone for the atrocities that took place on the beach four hundred years earlier. As if this kind of enactment was in dialogue with time itself and was trying to undo the damage of time or at least make restitution for it.

It could be argued that, as with Irish cinema, that the image has at last caught up with the agenda set by the word and that Irish cinema and Irish visual artists today, and one has only to think of Dorothy Cross or Kathy Prendergast to see Irish art operating at a level of engagement with the body and with landscape and with sexuality in a way that almost brings out the very things that Irish aesthetics was striving towards and struggling with but, which was in a way being marginalised because of its obsession with these kinds of issues. In some ways it could be argued that, almost like Irish rock music, becoming a presence on the world stage that a lot of the most innovative developments in contemporary art are coming from emergent Irish artists and in that way the image is at last catching up with the word.

Interviewer:

Fantastic thank you, so much information there

Gibbons:

It could be argued that one of the other anomalies of Irish art and indeed literary practice is the fact that it was modern before its time. That the pressures of Irish culture were forcing artists into experiments both in terms of visual representation and in terms of narrativity that really was not where metropolitan audiences were at. One of the key ones would have been a kind of reflexivity and a kind of self-consciousness about representation, which had been there from the very beginning. I mean Tristram Shandy is not necessarily an Irish novel because Sterne was brought up in Tipperary. Like it's a long way to Tipperary from Tristram Shandy. If

you look at Barry's work the whole pattern seems to be of a frame within a frame of an image within an image and indeed receding planes of images. In one painting there's almost four planes of the image and it's very hard to see where reality begins and the representation ends. He blocks off the frame that would allow you to see where one begins and the other ends. And it's almost questioning the whole basis of representation at the outset in its claim to mimic reality. The same was going on in the novel. That you had novelists like Lady Morgan who would have stories within stories and footnotes within those stories and then footnotes to the footnotes and then the whole thing is out of control. Frames within frames within frames so that what's really going on, even in the early Romantic period, is a questioning of the kind of natural basis of representation. I think in a way what Irish cinema and contemporary Irish art is probably most... one of its most striking characteristics is its use of the frame within the frame, and the questioning of the basis of art itself. Perhaps in popular cinema the most famous example of it is the beginning of *The Quiet Man* (1952), and it was very much a signature of John Ford. Looking through a window becomes a kind of projection of desire and characters tend to look through windows and see a world beyond which is not the world as it is but is a world of their own making, a world of their own heat oppressed brains. In recent Irish art perhaps the most powerful visualisation of this is Margaret Corcoran's exhibition on Edmund Burke's enquiry in which a female spectator travels through the Milltown rooms of the National Gallery looking at the paintings that were inspired by the sublime. But the spectator gets lost in the frame or connects images that were not meant to be connected, as if the only thing that connects the images in the room is the spectator walking around. As if the spectator changes the whole meaning of the images in keeping with what Burke and Barry had argued one hundred and fifty, two hundred years ago. That all that is needed to connect paintings in a room is for a person to walk into the room and to begin to take on meaning even where none was intended and that the glances from one painting to another set up almost accidental meanings that have no connection to the meanings of the painting themselves. In that sense I think that the kind of reflexivity of Irish art and its self consciousness and the fact that Irish artists were bringing almost this extra layer of critical engagement perhaps meant that naturalism and realism, the kinds of things that the image was most valued for,

especially in photography, that they were really the casualties of this kind of reflexivity. Almost as if there was more to vision than meets the eye and that Irish painters are trying to see what exactly is that more to vision, beyond the opticality of the image—all the other hidden histories of the image, and trying to bring them out into the open.

Interviewer:

Fantastic, brilliant

Gibbons:

Enough said.

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### **List of Illustrations**

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Fig 2. John Hinde Postcard.

Fig 3. Still from the Inishboffin documentary.

Fig4. Still from the Inishboffin documentary.